

A Flower in a Sinful Sea

By Tseng P'u

Translated by Rafe de Crespigny and Liu Ts'un-yan



Chapter I

*A torrent of waves washes over the Island of Happy Slavery;
While depicting the Flower of Freedom, scenes of over thirty years are unrolled.*

*After chanting a poem about the beautiful hills and rivers, the Spirit weeps,
For the Soul of Freedom is now rent asunder on the Central Plain.
The talented scholars gathered at the court,
The beauties in the gay quarters,
All were born in historic Soochow.
Inside a diplomatic carriage going westward,
Sorrows and grievances are suddenly felt, deep in the secret mind of love.
Drifting in a sinful sea,
The wrongs from the last incarnation are judged in the present.*

*The dragon-monsters continue to fight on the highways at night,
Our men are drunk in the midst of a celestial feast.
All frightened and trembling, awaking from their dreams.
The army barracks are desolate,
The gates of the Phoenix Palace opened wide,
And all dexterity in negotiation is seen.
Another epoch is approaching,
The eyes of Heaven stare harshly at the Manchus,
And the people's mind turns once more to Han.
Summoned by the wind of the east,
The God of the Flower of Freedom will soon appear.*



COVERS OF THE 1905 *FOREST OF FICTION* EDITION (left) and of the 1928 *Chen-mei-shan* edition (right).

About the God of Freedom: which was the holy man proclaimed by that title, and which was the dynasty that made the appointment? Where can one see the statue of that god? It is a long story to tell, and we should first describe the State of Slavery, where liberty runs wild.

Beyond the five oceans of the world are places that Columbus never found and Magellan never sailed to. There is a great sea, called the Sea of Sin. In the sea was an island, called the Island of Happy Slavery, about thirty degrees north latitude and a hundred and ten degrees east longitude, its mountains and rivers majestic and clear, its flowers and trees flourishing and fine. Yet all through the year the island was dull, half-shadowed with low clouds hanging from heaven, and the air was heavy and stale.

You may think to yourselves: 'The air that men must breathe and the freedom that they must possess, surely both are essential to their lives.' Just for this reason, all the people of that island were gasping for breath, and living in darkness and shame. Here was a nation that worshiped power and fawned upon foreigners, and that received from the traditions of the past a foolish belief in fate and the operation of karma. They had emperors and kings who were cruel and strict, like the First Emperor of Ch'in, like Augustus, Genghis Khan and Louis XIV, and they also had rulers who were confused and incompetent, like Emperor Yang of Sui, like Li Hou-chu, Charles I and Louis XVI. Their subjects could be as venal and corrupt as Feng Tao¹ and Ch'ien Ch'ien-yi,² or as crafty as Yang Hsiung³ and Chao Tzu-ang.⁴ However, since ancient times, that island had had no connection with the outside world, and other countries did not even know its name.

¹馮道 (882-954) was famous for having served no less than ten sovereigns of four different dynastic houses.

²錢謙益 (1582-1664) is said to have been one of the first to declare his allegiance when the victorious Manchu prince Dodo arrived at the gates of Nanking in June 1645.

³楊雄 (53 B.C.-18 A.D.) accepted office under Wang Mang, for which he is severely blamed by history.

⁴趙子昂, Chao Meng-fu 孟頫 (1254-1322), famous calligrapher and painter, descendant of the Sung royal house, attained high office under the Mongol dynasty.

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TWO EARLY VIEWS OF SHANGHAI: (1) from a painting by Piqua, done shortly after the opening of the port to foreign trade; (2) one of the illustrations to Wang T'ao's *Man-yu sui-lu*, published by Tien-shih studio in 1887.

In that place, there had never been a breath of freedom, and yet the people there considered themselves to be free: they had 'food', they had 'clothing', they had 'honour', they had 'family', all the necessities of freedom. Within the barbarous slavery of their lives, they did indeed have freedom, but that was not the freedom of 'liberty or death'. And when they had exhausted the possibilities of freedom as they had it, the time for disaster had come.

Fifty years ago, in the middle of the nineteenth century, that Island of Happy Slavery was suddenly stirred by great storms from every side. The island trembled to its foundations as if it was shaken by the god of the sea. And yet the people of that land, as if they were drunk or dreaming, continued day after day in their dancing and pleasure, seeking wealth or making love, drinking the wine of their liberty and enjoying the flowers of their freedom. The months and days ran by, year followed year, and in 1904, to their dismay, the sky fell down on top of them, the earth crumbled in ruins around them, and with an echoing crash that Island of Happy Slavery sank into the Sea of Sin.

Alas, that Island of Happy Slavery and that Sea of Sin, they are not very far from the country of China, south of the Gobi Desert, west of the Yellow Sea, east of Kokonor and north of the China Sea.

When this catastrophe was discovered, Shanghai had long been China's major commercial port, and people from all the nations of the world gathered there. All the people of Shanghai said it was very strange that this disaster should have come, and every day there were people discussing it and asking about it, wearing out numbers of writing brushes and wasting quantities of paper and ink, all to debate these questions. A certain man, who called himself Lover of Liberty, heard about this and came especially to Shanghai to discover the real state of the Island of Happy Slavery; yet he did not really know where the questioning should begin.

When Lover of Liberty went out to look around, he saw the pompous, portly compradors, the cheating officials of the new government system, the pseudo-revolutionaries with their short-cropped hair and western dress, and the newspaper reporters with their foggy talk and misleading words. They all behaved as if nothing was happening. They continued to play their mahjong, to



Suddenly he came to a place where he raised his head to look about and he gazed on open country. . . .



CHIN T' IEN-HE, "A Lover of Liberty" (see p. 19).

visit their prostitutes, to drink their tea at the Arcady, to listen to the singing at the Nest of Heavenly Pleasure. Their horses and carriages flowed along the roads, their heavens were full of flowers and their ground was running with wine. What a scene of peace!

Lover of Liberty could not understand their confidence and unconcern, and he gazed at them for several days with confusion and surprise.

One day, when he was sitting alone with his thoughts, he suddenly saw a number of people hurrying towards him and shouting. Their faces were flushed, their hands were trembling, and they cried aloud as they rushed past: "Great misfortune, great misfortune! The Japanese and the Russians are at war. The Three Eastern Provinces will soon be lost." Even as they said so, a man sitting nearby gave a cold smile and answered: "Why only the Three Eastern Provinces? The whole country is defenceless."

Lover of Liberty heard the news with a shock. Only a moment before his world had been at peace; how could it change so quickly? In a daze, he stood up and went out, and as he went, he lost all thought of the distance that he travelled. Suddenly he came to a place where he raised his head to look about and he gazed on open country. The hills had the colour of yellow gold, the streams had the fragrance of milk. There were several dozen magnificent houses, and many trees with bright green leaves. It was a land of beauty, adorned with mountains and rivers, all that a man could dream of. But in this vast and empty land, so peaceful and still, not a soul could be seen.

Lover of Liberty felt in his mind as if he had been to this place before. As he lingered, loath to leave, he caught sight of a small empty room in a building close by. Almost automatically, he walked towards it, and when he came to the entrance he found a screen of pearls hung before the opening. Peering through the screen to look inside, he saw what appeared to be a bowl of flowers,

strange and enchanting, vivid in colours. Perhaps these were the red blossoms of Emperor Yang of Sui, or perhaps flowers from the tree of jade of the last lord of Ch'en. He was only aware of a gentle springlike aura and an enchanting, enveloping fragrance, which came wafting out to him through the pearl-blind.

Surely it would be better, he thought to himself, to see these things from closer at hand. Summoning up his courage, he pushed aside the curtain, and with firm paces he entered the chamber. There were flowers no more! Instead there was now the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, with broad forehead and fine eyebrows, with the complexion of a peach and with lips small as cherries.

Lover of Liberty started with surprise, and he was about to go back when the beauty spoke to him: "Son of Liberty, Son of Liberty, a strange thing has happened in the Island of Happy Slavery. Isn't that what you have come to ask about?"

As soon as Lover of Liberty heard the words 'Island of Happy Slavery', he immediately remembered all that had happened. He stopped in his tracks, bowed in formal fashion, and said: "Madam, do you know of the Island of Happy Slavery?"

The woman laughed and replied: "Are you mad? Where is the Island of Happy Slavery?"

Lover of Liberty, very surprised, asked: "Is there no such place?"

The woman laughed again and answered: "You really are a fool. The Island of Happy Slavery is everywhere."

As she spoke, her hands held out a roll of paper, and she presented it with a serious air to Lover of Liberty. He could not think why she was giving it to him, but he opened the scroll to look inside, and it was a work of history, fresh and interesting. The idea came to him, blurred and uncertain, that China too had such curious and remarkable events as these. . . .

NO WAY of telling how he returned to his home, but the scroll he had seen caused him to think back on the history of his times. He still had a vague recollection of the story, but he was worried that time would go by and he would forget, so he slowly wrote things down. Yet then, even as he was writing, he threw his brush away. "I am a fool. There is my friend, the Sick Man of East Asia, who boasts of himself as the king of story-tellers, and an expert in editing and translating modern novels such as this. I shall simply tell him the story in detail, and he will reproduce it for me, chapter by chapter, and that will surely save me a great many brushes and a great quantity of ink."

So saying, he took up his unfinished manuscript, and he went straight out the door, and in the distance he saw the 'Forest of Fiction' bookstore, and he went to his friend the Sick Man of East Asia, and told him the story and asked him to arrange for publication of his new historical novel. As Lover of Liberty dictated, the Sick Man of East Asia wrote it down. So it was:

*A tale of thirty years
And the words all written in blood.
Four hundred million fellow-country-men,
Let them come quickly to the shores of enlightenment.*

What is this tale that I have spoken of? If you find it not too troublesome, please read the chapters that follow.

Chapter II

*Lu chü-jen visits a courtesan and has a feast in Soochow;
Chin chuang-yüan is returning home on leave, passing by Shanghai.*

THE GREAT CH'ING DYNASTY was obedient to the will of heaven and to the requirements of the fates, and the spread of its power encompassed ten thousand lands. All were governed by the ancient laws of China. So it happened that the whole of nature conspired in its favour, the nation was powerful and the people had peace, and the imperial succession continued without a break. Indeed, it is impossible to give adequate praise to these men. To sing of their work or hymn their virtues is like gazing at the sun or looking up to the clouds, so high are their achievements.

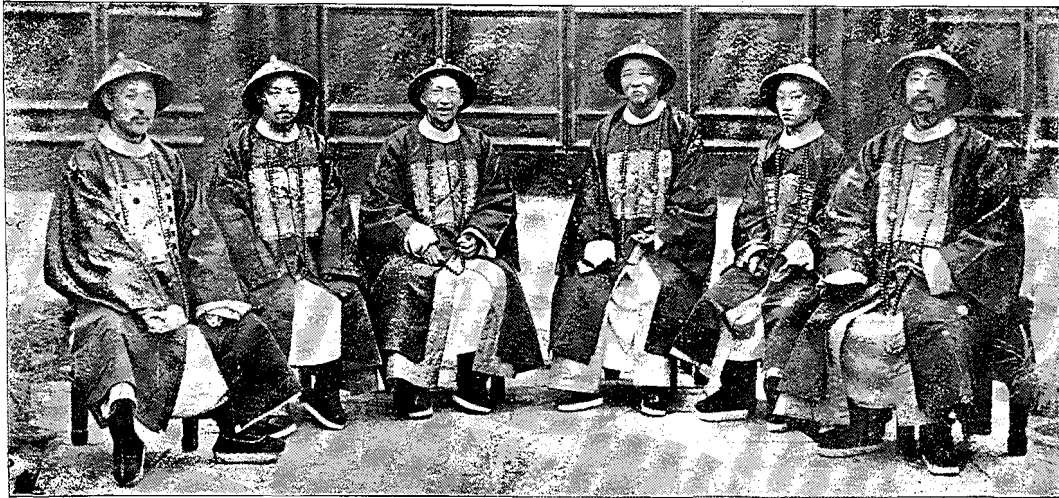
But then, in the time of the Hsien-feng Emperor, the Taiping bandits rose in rebellion, and for many years there was turmoil and disturbance. The court relied on qualified scholars and the men of the Han-lin Academy, and after more than twenty years of toil and bloodshed, with more than a hundred thousand people dead, the revolutionary army was swept away and utterly destroyed. This was 1866, the fifth year of the T'ung-chih reign, and rebellion was ended and all the world shared in joy, and now it was said everywhere that the great Ch'ing state would last ten thousand years more.

The patron of this spiritual revival in the dynasty was the T'ung-chih Emperor himself, granting the requests of his ministers in their memorials, and issuing orders to all the provinces and prefectures to enlarge the quota of *hsiu-ts'ai* graduates from all those districts which had offered volunteers to fight the rebels, while those places which had suffered most severely and been the scene of bitter fighting were granted exemption from many of their taxes. In Soochow, Sungkiang, Ch'ang-chou, Chenkiang and Taitsang, since the taxation there had been particularly heavy, a gracious edict lessened their burden of tribute grain, and the people of Soochow wept tears of gratitude.

In 1868 came the year of the examinations. In all the time of turmoil and war just passed, the scholars of the empire were never prepared to abandon their affection for essays in eight paragraphs, poems in eight rhymes, the art of calligraphy, and the white folding books for

CANDIDATES FOR THE OFFICIAL EXAMINATIONS, late nineteenth century photograph (from Favier, *Peking*, 1897).





EXAMINERS (same source).

composition. And now, at last, the time had come again when they could practise their skills to full effect, and could praise the emperor in literary style and hope of reward. So the candidates for office and rank collected at the capital like clouds, and their carriages came in a never-ending stream.

When the examination for the *chin-shih* degree was ended, the list of successful candidates from all the empire was published in letters of gold. Those who had failed to pass the test hung their heads in a natural self-pity and left the capital with all their bag and baggage. They crossed the Marco Polo Bridge over the Sangkan River by the south gate of Peking, and there were few at that place who did not let fall some tears of despair and distress.

Those who had obtained the degree, however, now saw with delight that their fortunes were made. They bowed to their examiners, congratulated their fellows, and then went off in parties to get drunk. Next came the Temple Examination, to determine final placings among the new graduates, and in the third month the results were published. Third on the list was Huang Wen-tsai, from Chishan in Shansi, second on the list was Wang Tz'u-yüan from Shanhua in Hunan; and first on the list, with the title *chuang-yüan*, was a man called Chin Chün, from Soochow in Kiangsu.

A man who had never seen the register of graduates might fail to appreciate the honour and value of this first placing, *chuang-yüan*. Of all the countries in the world, only China possessed such a system of examination, and this highest degree was awarded only once in three years. Such a position might be the reward for an individual who has accumulated in one incarnation after another good deeds and stored up virtue, for a lifetime of utter chastity and avoidance of female charms, and for a very good relationship with the officials of the capital. With all these qualifications, if his praise of the emperor is more fulsome than that of his rivals, then at last he will be considered worthy of the prize. A man with this achievement could be described as chief of all the immortals and favoured pupil of the Son of Heaven. In wealth and honour, in wisdom and intelligence, even Su Shih and Li Po would keep respectful distance, and foreigners like Bacon of England or Rousseau of France were quite out of their class. Let us, however, put all this aside for a time.

IN THE CITY of Soochow, the Monastery of Mysterious Joy lies in the centre of the town, and there is a teahouse called Garden of Elegance. One day, soon after these events described at the capital, three men were sitting there at a table drinking tea. P'an Tseng-ch'i, an elderly man with a long beard, came from a leading gentry family in Soochow city. Ch'ien Tuan-min, a middle-aged man with a long, thin face, was well-known as a critic of scripts and essays, and was already qualified as an academician. The third man, with a small round face, who sat at the foot of the table, was called Lu Jen-hsiang. He was a fine calligrapher in the formal style used at the examinations, though he still held no more than the low degree of *chü-jen*. All three men were famous and respected in Soochow.



THE MONASTERY OF MYSTERIOUS JOY 玄妙觀, late 19th century woodblock print from Soochow (桃花塢木版年畫).

As they sat, they had come to the point in their discussion where P'an Tseng-ch'i was saying: "We men of Soochow, we're pretty good. Since this dynasty began its examinations, there have been ninety-seven men with the *chuang-yüan* degree, and fifty-five of them have come from Kiang-su province. Of those fifty-five, fifteen came from Soochow. And now Chin Chün, from Yüan-ch'iao Lane, has also become *chuang-yüan*, that is really brilliant."

Ch'ien Tuan-min supported him: "As you say, the people of Soochow have always had literary abilities, and it is only natural that *chuang-yüan* should come from here. More than that, the way I see it, Soochow's successes in the *chuang-yüan* test are very closely linked with the fortune of our dynasty."

"Do explain," said P'an, rather doubtfully.

"In this dynasty," said Ch'ien Tuan-min, "the most successful and prosperous period has been that of Ch'ien-lung, and that time was also the most fortunate for Soochow scholars in the

chuang-yüan degree. Chang Shu-hsün and Ch'en Ch'u-che, Shih Cho-t'ang and P'an Chih-hsüan, all took first positions in two successive examinations, and with Ch'ien Hsiang-ling we once held the three top places together. However, since the Chia-ch'ing reign period we have had only Wu T'ing-ch'en and Wu Hsin-chung. In the sixteenth year, though we did not get the *chuang-yüan* degree for first place in the first-class list, the second and third placings, and the first place in the second-class list, all went to Soochow, and that is a pretty fair record. But from the time of Tao-kuang, there has only been Wu Chung-chün, fellow-graduate of my father, and if you compare this with the past it's almost insignificant. In the same way, the fortune of the state has also changed from one time to the other, and in the Hsien-feng period, we can remember ourselves that the examinations were held five times and Soochow had no success at all."

Counting the number with a single finger, and shaking his head to emphasise the point, Ch'ien went on: "In all that time, my father's friend P'an Tsung-yin once gained third placing, but since then there has been no mention of Soochow in the first three places. If this new emperor is to achieve a restoration of the dynasty, so that it really does continue for tens of thousands of years, it is certain that the *chuang-yüan* position must be held by a man from Soochow."

Lu Jen-hsiang agreed. "Ch'ien has explained the pattern of balancing the *yin* and the *yang* perfectly, and my old class-mate Chin Chün is obviously a superb scholar. His essay-work and calligraphy are absolutely first-class, and he is completely at home with all the historical criticism and analysis. I saw him last year when he was working at home, collating *The History of the Yüan Dynasty*, and I was simply amazed at his knowledge and understanding of those outlandish Mongolian names. When he was reading them out to me, they sounded just like the foreign devils today."

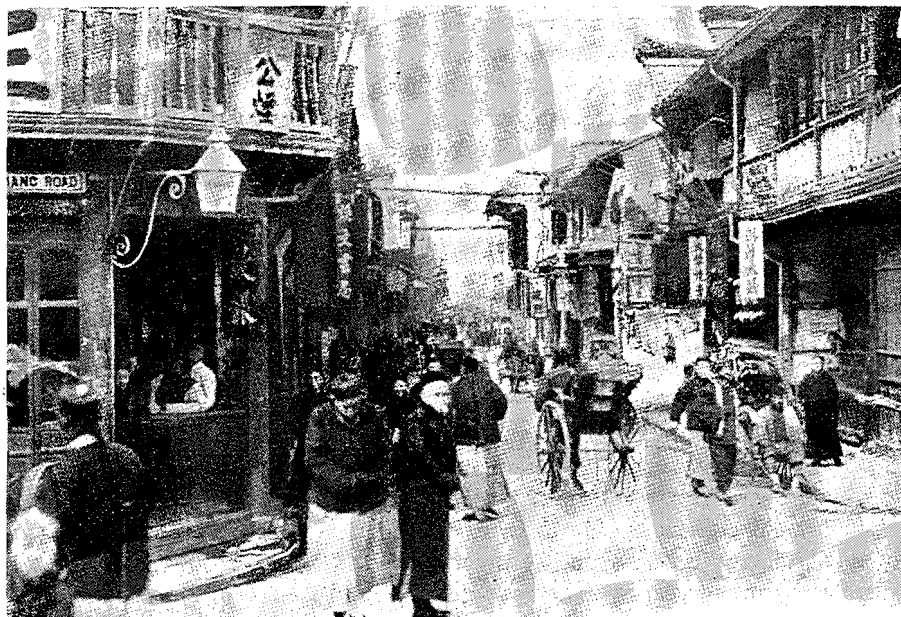
P'an Tseng-ch'i spoke seriously: "That's a foolish thing to say. How can you compare the Mongols with the foreigners we have to deal with? It is said that the great Yüan dynasty is the ancestor of our own great Ch'ing, and the Mongols are close relations and trusted servants of the throne. Haven't you ever heard of Seng-ko-lin-chin and Wu-la-hsi Ch'ung-a?"

P'an meant to continue, but Ch'ien Tuan-min suddenly caught sight of a friend of his outside the teashop, and called out to him: "Chao-t'ing!" Everyone turned to look. They saw a short, brisk man, with thin features. He was already coming into the room, and he smiled as he approached them. Directly behind him was another scholar, with a most handsome face, long eye-lashes and shining eyes.

Lu Jen-hsiang half stood in greeting, then turned to the newcomer and asked: "What brings our friend T'ai-chen here?" Kuo Chao-t'ing smiled and replied, "We met on the road, and since I knew you would all be here I brought him along too. Did you know that this evening Hsieh Chieh-fu is holding a farewell party for you, at Pearl Liang's house on the Ts'ang-ch'iao Bund?"

Lu nodded his head. "It's still early, though," he said, and he led Kuo Chao-t'ing to join them at their table. Ch'ien Tuan-min called Ho T'ai-chen to sit next to him. He hadn't been following the conversation, but when he heard the words 'farewell feast' he turned round and asked Lu: "Where are you off to? How is it I haven't heard anything about it?"

"I'm only going to Shanghai," said Lu Jen-hsiang. "I had a letter the other day to say that Chin Chün has taken leave to visit his parents, and he is coming to Shanghai. He is staying at the Inn of Fame and Profit, and he promised he would spend a few days with me. I have gone through Shanghai several times on my way to take the examinations at the capital, but I have heard now that the place has become much brighter. Since the *k'un ch'ü* troupes left Soochow to play at the Great Culture and Great Elegance theatres in Shanghai, they are doing good business there, and the Peking opera in the Bright Cassia Tea Garden and the Golden Cassia Pavilion are also supposed to be very fine. You can eat Peking-style food at T'ung-hsing and T'ung-hsin, and Anhwei style at the Hsin-hsin Tower and the Fu-hsin Garden. For European cooking there are the Almond-Blossom Tower and the Shared Fragrance Tower, the First-class Fragrance and the Family Spring, but I haven't been to them yet."



SUNGKIANG ROAD, Shanghai, at the turn of the century.

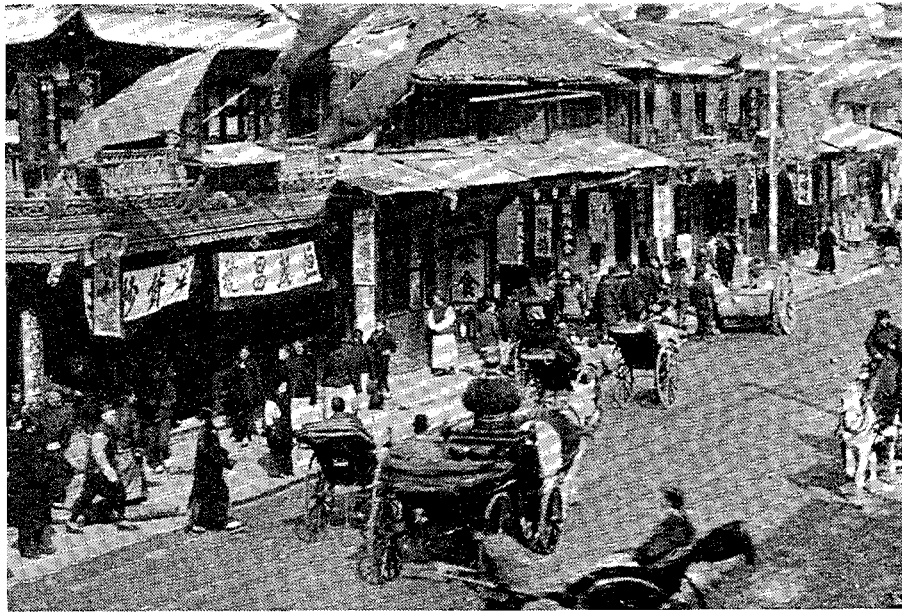
Ho T'ai-chen broke in: "Even though Shanghai is so gay and splendid, it's basically rather a mess. Some of the biggest confidence men you could find are living there. There's that calligrapher Mo Yu-chih and that painter T'ang Hsün-po. They have admirers everywhere and they're certainly famous, but I still think they're charlatans. Compare them with our Soochow men, the formal script of Yao Feng-sheng, the seal writing of Yang Yung-ch'un and the painting of Jen Fu-ch'ang, and then you can see the difference between elegance and vulgarity."

Ch'ien Tuan-min said: "A great deal of the printing now is done by some technique they call lithography. I once saw a book of *Candidates' Essays from Chihli*, and the printing was remarkably clear and the characters were extremely pleasant and easy to read. For some books, the printing technique is more important than anything else: if the print is good and the paper is good and the design is good, then even if the content doesn't match the appearance it can still leap to the eye and cheer the heart."

P'an Tseng-ch'i had been listening for some time to the excited talk of these younger men, and he was not prepared to stay out of the discussion any longer. Raising up his cup of tea with its saucer and taking a sip, he said: "Shanghai is a whirlpool of gaiety and luxury. I have heard that Paoshan Street is the site of the tomb of the former chancellor of the Ming dynasty, Hsü Kuang-ch'i. Hsü Kuang-ch'i was one of the first men to encourage the introduction of Western learning, but since the time that the port was opened there has been no way to preserve his grave. Now there are men who make up requiem verses for him, saying

*'Friends, come stroll down Paoshan Street,
Fragrant dust, soft and gentle, with lotus footprints;
Where is the tomb of the ancient chancellor?
Half below the market-place, half beneath the brothel!'*

Surely that is rather sad for him."



UPPER NANKING ROAD.

Kuo Chao-t'ing asked: "Did Chin Chün come overland from the capital, or has he come by steamer?"

Lu Jen-hsiang replied: "He came on an American ship owned by Russell & Company."

"Talking of steamboats," said P'an Tseng-ch'i, "a few days ago I saw in the paper all the details of steamers entering and leaving port. They often call their ships after Chinese place-names, like Hanyang, Chungking, Nanking, Shanghai, Keelung and Taiwan. The most curious one came at the end: there is a boat on the Yangtse named 'Confucius.'" Everyone listened with surprise, then they all burst out laughing.

By this time, the sun had slipped gradually into the west and dusk was drawing on. "It's getting late," said P'an Tseng-ch'i, standing up from the table, "I must make my excuses." He bowed to each in turn and took his leave.

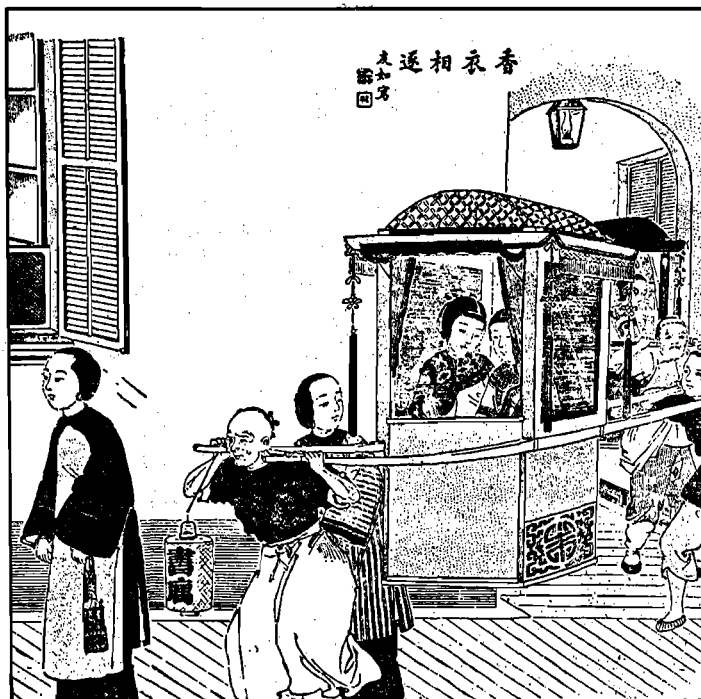
Kuo Chao-t'ing said: "Jen-hsiang, are you coming to Pearl's house now? If we want to get in, this is the time to leave."

Lu Jen-hsiang said: "I'm sorry about Tuan-min and T'ai-chen. They've never been to a party like this. Why don't they come too?"

"They're neo-Confucianists," said Kuo Ch'ao-t'ing. "Consider yourself lucky if they don't give you a sermon. It would be wrong for you to try to lead them astray."

Ho T'ai-chen had always favoured the teachings of the Ch'eng brothers and Chu Hsi, and Ch'ien Tuan-min was a close relation. They had ideals in common, and neither had ever shown any interest in women. That was why Kuo Chao-t'ing talked that way. Ho and Ch'ien both laughed, but then they got up to leave, turning to Lu Jen-hsiang to say: "When you see our colleague Chin Chün, tell him to come home soon. We all look forward to meeting him again." And they walked away.

Kuo Chao-t'ing and Lu Jen-hsiang went off together, straight to the west of the monastery, past the front of the Temple of Kuan-ti, god of war, and over Oriole Lane Bridge. Then they heard a sedan chair coming along behind them, and they stopped where they were to let it go by. To



A TIEN-SHIH STUDIO
LITHOGRAPH by Wu Yu-ju.

their surprise, it was a woman riding inside, very elegant. When she saw the two men, she called to them in the Soochow dialect: "Master Kuo, Master Lu, where have you been? Master Hsieh has already arrived. You should hurry." Even as she spoke, the sedan chair raced on down the street. Both men recognised Pearl Liang.

They followed the winding way, came out by Chuan Chu Lane, on down Ch'angmen Road, along the Low Embankment, and then straight to Pearl Liang's lodging. As she had said, Hsieh Chieh-fu was already there, and when he saw Kuo and Lu he got up at once and called them over.

Kuo Chao-t'ing laughed and said: "A philanthropist, nothing but compassion for others, and today he comes to ease the anxieties of such a generous woman!" As he spoke, Pearl came up to offer melon-seeds, and Lu Jen-hsiang whispered to her: "Aren't you getting impatient?" Pearl turned away and put the bowl down. Sinking into a chair, "Nonsense, what can you be talking about?" she replied.

The reader might wonder why Kuo Chao-t'ing described Hsieh Chieh-fu as a philanthropist. Hsieh came from a wealthy family, he enjoyed helping others, and in the city of Soochow he was known as Hsieh the Generous. When Kuo spoke to him like that, everyone laughed.

Lu Jen-hsiang looked around and saw one other guest, sitting by himself in a corner, a strong-looking man, though not very tall. He had a round shining face, a kind and honest expression, and he looked about thirty years old. When he saw Kuo and Lu he smiled at them and called them over. Hsieh Chieh-fu explained: "This is Ch'eng Mu-sheng from Ch'ang-chou. He arrived here yesterday from Shanghai."

They exchanged introductions and sat down together. Just as they did so, a maid-servant announced: "The Honourable Pei has come." Lu Jen-hsiang looked up and recognised Pei Yu-ts'eng of Changchow, who had lately been made Provincial Judge in Chihli. He was one of the officials that took part in the peace negotiations after the burning of the Summer Palace at Peking, and he had made a name for himself there, but now, for some reason he had given up his office and come back to live in Soochow.

Everyone turned to greet him, and then they set up the table. Pearl Liang asked each guest to choose his partner for the meal. Lu Jen-hsiang asked for Fairy Wu, Kuo Chao-t'ing for Cassia Chu and Ch'eng Mu-sheng for Elegance Yao. Then Hsieh Chieh-fu said: "Mr. Pei, whom will you choose?"

Pei Yu-ts'eng replied: "I hear there is a girl from Hangchow with the surname Ch'u, and her other name is something like Forest of Love. Ask for her." Hsieh wrote it down.

"Talking of this Forest of Love Ch'u," said Lu Jen-hsiang, "there's a curious story I heard. A few days ago a man went to her place for tea, and he found that her room there had a collection of stringed instruments and flutes, and a number of scrolls of stone rubbings, painting and calligraphy. They had seals on them from famous men and well-known collections, and one particularly strange thing was a jade seal-block which looked very much as if it had belonged to an imperial concubine of the Han dynasty. Either she comes from an old family which has gone down in the world, or maybe she is a runaway concubine."

"Surely," said Kuo Chao-t'ing, "that must be the seal of Flying Swallow Chao; it was in Kung Ting-an's collection. Mr. Kung's collected works still contain four poems about it."

"Two days ago," remarked Ch'eng Mu-sheng, "I saw Mr. Kung's son, Kung Hsiao-ch'i, in Shanghai."

"Don't mention that fellow," said Pei Yu-ts'eng. "He has completely gone over to the foreigners."

Hsieh Chieh-fu asked then: "Why should he turn traitor so quickly? The foreigners must have offered him a lot of money if he agreed to act as a guide to them."

"It's not that," replied Pei Yu-ts'eng. "He's a strange man, and he has funny ideas. He claims he would rather hand our country over to the foreigners than leave it with the Manchus. Just think of it!"

Kuo Chao-t'ing said: "I think it is because of his father, Kung Ting-an. He used to say things like that; and there is a proverb which says 'if the father kills a man for good reason, the son will kill for fun'. That explains quite a lot."

"If that sort of man is not eliminated," said Ch'eng Mu-sheng, "it will do great harm to our dynasty."

"True enough," agreed Pei Yu-ts'eng. "In the troubles with the foreigners at Peking in 1860, we were saved from disaster only by Prince Ching. He stayed behind to look after the government, and I was there too, running some errands. We negotiated day and night with the Englishman, Thomas Wade, and under the auspicious influence of the imperial ancestors we were able to come to an agreement with Wade for payment of an indemnity, for commercial exchanges and for an early date when the enemy would withdraw their troops. If Prince Ching hadn't been there, just think about it: the capital would have fallen, the long-hair Taiping rebels would have overrun all the outer provinces, and everything would have been in chaos. It's too much to contemplate. In that time, I may have suffered some personal hardship, but I am sure it was well worthwhile. And today, we all enjoy great peace once more."

Hsieh Chieh-fu said: "Speaking of that time, Mr. Pei is one of the most valuable ministers in the empire."

"You're too kind," said Pei.

"The way I see it," put in Ch'eng Mu-sheng, "even though our empire is at peace now, we can't count on things staying like that, and foreign influence grows more powerful all the time. Day after day there are more machines, steamers, railroads, telegraphs and guns, but our state has nothing. How are we ever going to deal with them?"

Just as he was speaking, though, all the girls came in together, and the five men threw away their cares and anxieties. They now poured out the wine, and they studied only the clear, soft notes of the music and the jade smiles and pearly breath of their companions. No need to say more. Everyone, however, turned to admire the features of Forest of Love Ch'u, and indeed she

equalled her reputation. Her carriage was fine and graceful, her age a little over twenty. When anyone asked about her history, she would simply smile and make no reply. All that was known was that she lived with a girl called Wang, and they had both come from Hangchow together. The men all agreed to come and visit her after the party had broken up. Then the twelfth bell sounded, the girls scattered and were gone, and Hsieh Chieh-fu, Pei Yu-tseng, Kuo Chao-t'ing and Ch'eng Mu-sheng went away with Forest of Love Ch'u.

Lu Jen-hsiang, however, since he was going to Shanghai next day and still had to finish his packing, did not go with them. He called his sedan chairbearers to light the lamps, made his farewells to the company, and went off separately.

THE NEW GRADUATE, Chin Chün, had asked leave to visit his parents, and he travelled on a steamer, fast as a seahorse, south to Shanghai. He stayed there at the Inn of Fame and Fortune, and it was naturally essential that he should make visits to pay respects to the magistrates of the circuit, the country and the other provincial officials. At the same time, there were also social functions, and he was invited to drink wine and to see plays, and there were always people from his home district who came to call on him.

One day, soon after he had arrived, a servant came in with a card, saying that the Honourable Feng had come to pay his respects. When Chin Chün saw the characters Feng Kuei-fen, he got up quickly and said to ask the gentleman in. The servant held the card high in his hand, went to the door, and stepped aside to raise the bamboo curtains. Coming towards him was an old man of about sixty, with a white beard, two bright and piercing eyes, and a back very slightly stooped. When he saw Chin Chün, he smiled in greeting.

Chin Chün stepped quickly towards him, addressing him as Uncle Feng, and made him a very low bow. Ceremonies completed, both men sat down, the room-boy brought in tea, and they discussed the affairs of the capital.

Feng Kuei-fen said: "Chin Chün, I congratulate you on your fine achievement. On the other hand, at this present time, when all the nations of the world are in contact with one another, a few old-fashioned essays in fancy style on odd points of text criticism are hardly enough to be any help to the empire. In former times, Confucius studied all the works of value from a hundred and twenty states, and the way I see it, any studies in the present day should be designed to make you understand the language of foreign countries and to help you appreciate the reasons for their prosperity; things like physics, chemistry and electricity, the manufacture of steamships and of guns. If you study all these things properly, then you may claim to be really educated. I've heard that in the third month of last year the College of Foreign Languages was opened in Peking, to accept bright students and train them to study the language of each country and astronomy. You know the principle that 'anything not known is shameful for a Confucian scholar', and this is surely just the point. Yet the officials at court have written in opposition, and Wo Liang-feng, who is a well-known Confucianist, has also sent in a memorial. I get the Court Gazette sent to me, and I really couldn't agree with his arguments. I have heard that everyone talks of the new students at the College of Foreign Languages as foreign Han-lin and *chü-jen*. Is this true?"

Chin Chün nodded, and Feng Kuei-fen continued: "You flourish now in the highest honour, and you're a first-ranking scholar in China. If you took the chance to go round the world and study all current affairs, wouldn't that be something even more? Now I know a certain Mr. Hsü Hsüeh-ts'en, a man of great learning, and a great eclectic of both Chinese and Western learning. He has a son called Ying, just about your age. He has never taken the examinations, but every day he talks about western ideas."

Chin Chün was just going to say something, but the servant came in again and announced: "A Mr. Lu from Soochow has come to call."

Feng Kuei-fen asked who this could be, and Chin Chün replied: "It is probably Lu Jen-hsiang."

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LI JEN-SHU (see Ch. 3), Professor of Mathematics at the College of Foreign Languages, with his pupils (photograph by John Thomson, 1873).

And indeed it was that young man. He came brightly into the room, and when he saw the two men he quickly paid his respects and sat down. Tea was brought in again, and the three of them talked idly of one thing and another: when Chin Chün had left Peking; when he had arrived in Shanghai; and he learnt that Lu Jen-hsiang was staying at the Inn of Steady Prosperity. Then Feng Kuei-fen said: "You've chosen a very good time to come, you two gentlemen, for they have a flower show in the rear court of the British Consulate in the fourth month of every year. There are flowers from all the foreign countries, and the display is well worth seeing. The day after tomorrow, I invite you to come and see this with me."

He sipped two mouthfuls of tea, got up and took his leave. The other two went with him out the door, came back and talked a moment about the weather, then gossiped casually. Then Chin Chün said: "I have already been to Bubbling Well Monastery and Zigawei flower garden, and they are not worth visiting again. But I would like to go the Public Gardens. We'll get something to eat here, and when we've eaten, we can go to the gardens by horse-carriage."

Lu Jen-hsiang agreed, so Chin Chün ordered the meal to be brought in, and also asked the cashier's office to order a hansom cab for them. After they had eaten, washed their faces and rinsed their mouths, the room-boy came to say that the cab was now waiting at the door. Chin Chün took a key from the folds of his clothing, opened his box, changed his gown, and took up a circular fan. He invited Lu Jen-hsiang to go on ahead, then locked the door of his room, spoke briefly to his own servant and to the room-boy, gave the key in at the office, went out the gate and got into the carriage. The driver shook the reins, and the fine brown Arab moved so smoothly that it seemed they just flew along to the Bund.

They followed the Bund towards the north. To use the classical phrase, 'the reins were held proudly and the track ran smooth beneath them'. They could see the waters of the Whangpoo, calm and glassy, with sails and masts like trees in a forest. They looked over to the bronze statue of Gordon, on the further bank of the river, and then went on till they came to a tablet of stone which they realised must be the Obelisk. Then the cab came to a halt, and they got down and went

in through the gates of the gardens. It really was a view of 'terraces and pavilions clear and far, flowers and trees fine and strange'. The two men sat for a while in a small pavilion, looking at the passers-by, men and women, Chinese and European, with short coats and stiff collars, thin waists and long skirts, round fans and light gowns, painted and adorned, dazzling materials. Then, as they sat there, still gazing at the spectacle, they saw a foreigner coming towards them followed by a Chinese, age about forty, with eyes like agate and a thin beard on his chin, also yellow in colour. These two also sat down in the pavilion.

The newcomers jabbered away to one another in some foreign language, and Chin Chün and Lu Jen-hsiang had not the least idea what they could be talking about. Then the sun went down, and the trees and groves became dark. Chin and Lu strolled back again, out the gate, called up their cab, and travelled again along the Bund. When they came to Nanking Road, and turned down there towards Foochow Road, they found houses on both sides were still under construction. However, just as they planned to go to Paoshan Street via Makka Stockyard, they met with Chin Chün's servant. He was carrying an invitation card, and he called out to them: "The Honourable Hsüeh has invited my master to a banquet in Room 8 at First-class Fragrance."

Chin Chün realised at once that the invitation must come from Hsüeh Fu-jen of Wuhsi, and he nodded assent. Lu Jen-hsiang, then, was going back to his lodgings, so he got down from the cab at Chessboard Street and Chin Chün went on alone, down Chessboard Street, turned eastwards, and finally came to the door of First-class Fragrance.

As Chin Chün came in, the man at the reception desk on the ground floor pressed an electric bell, an attendant came to meet him, and led him to Room 8 on the first floor. Hsüeh Fu-jen was already there, and he got up to welcome him. There were five others also in the party, and they were introduced one by one. The first was Lü Ts'ang-shu, from Tsunyi in Kweichow, a 'tribute student'. He had sent in a memorial of ten thousand words in response to an edict, and as a result he had been given the rank of a magistrate and was now in Kiangsu to wait for his specific appointment. Three others were Li Pao-feng of Chungming, Ma Chung-chien of Tantu and Wang Kung-hsien of Chiaying. All three had a knowledge both of China and of the West. The fifth man was Hsü Ying of Wuhsi, the same person that Feng Kuei-fen had mentioned to Chin Chün earlier in the day.

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They all made polite greetings, and took their places. Waiters brought in the menu-cards, and each chose his own dishes. Then Hsüeh Fu-chen ordered a large bottle of champagne to be opened, and they drank and talked.

Suddenly, as they sat there in the room, there was the sound of someone walking past outside in leather-soled boots, and they looked up to see who went by. It was the same two men, the Chinese and Westerner, whom Chin Chün had seen that evening in the Public Gardens. Hsüeh Fu-chen indicated the Chinese and said: "Do any of you recognise that man?" None of the others knew who he was, and Hsüeh told them: "That is Kung Hsiao-ch'i."

"Isn't he Kung Ting-an's son?" asked Lü Ts'ang-shu.

"That's right," said Hsüeh. "Originally, he knew no English, but then Thomas Wade wanted to read *The History of the Han Dynasty* in Chinese, and he asked for someone to explain it to him. At first, nobody dared to go, but then Hsiao-ch'i volunteered, and Wade now places the greatest trust in him. I have even heard that the burning of the Summer Palace was actually his idea."

"I don't know the name of that foreigner," said Ma Chung-chien, "but I am sure he is someone from the consulate."

Hsüeh Fu-chen went on: "Kung Hsiao-ch'i took two concubines, and the one from Shanghai was his particular favourite. Whenever he would write anything, one of the girls ground the ink for him and the other ruled up the columns in red on the paper. But then, in the first month of this year, the two of them, without any sign or warning, suddenly ran away together. He has been asking after them everywhere, and there is absolutely no trace. It's really quite a joke."

They were all talking cheerfully when another man walked past outside the door and turned to look into the room. Lü Ts'ang-shu got up and went to the door to talk for a moment. There is a verse to describe what will happen:

*Gathering of scholars and charming ladies,
Meeting of talents beside the Yangtse;
Roaming at will by the river, downhearted and alone,
One may often find unusual men.*

But you do not yet know who this is. You must read the next chapter.

THE PUBLIC GARDENS ON THE SHANGHAI BUND, 1878 (photograph by the Vicomte Brenier de Montmorand, French Consul-General in Shanghai 1864-69, Envoy in Peking 1876-80).

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Chapter III

*There is a Flower Show at the British Consulate;
Master 'Half Morality' tells the romance of Spring of the Western Forest*

WE HAVE JUST TOLD how Hsüeh Fu-jen asked Chin Chün to a dinner at the First-Class Fragrance. While they were talking, a man had come to the door and Lü Ts'ang-shu got up and went to talk to him. When they had exchanged a few words, he asked him to come in, and all the others stood up to offer him a seat and welcome him. They asked his name, and learnt that it was Yün Hung, a man from Kwangtung. He was one of those officials waiting to fill a vacancy as a deputy sub-prefect in Kiangsu. He had seen a good deal of the world, and he talked with an air of authority.

The general conversation now turned, with enthusiasm, to Western politics. Chin Chün listened quietly for a while, but was conscious of a feeling of embarrassment. It occurred to him that even though he had achieved the degree of *chuang-yüan*, and though he was famous throughout the empire, he had never really thought of anything beyond the borders of China. When he heard these discussions of foreign affairs, he knew nothing about them. From now on, he told himself, this success in the examination is not enough: I must study something of foreign institutions and learn about the ways of the West. It would greatly further his career if he could get a post on the staff of the Tsungli Yamen.

He was sitting there, still lost in thought, when the waiter brought in the pudding. He did not even notice the new activity until the others called to him, and then he came round with a start. Fairly soon, the meal came to an end, and they finished with coffee. The waiter brought in the bill, Hsüeh Fu-jen signed it, and the guests thanked him and took their leave. Chin Chün rode home in a cab.

When he came to the door of his lodgings, he saw a great quantity of baggage spread out near the entrance and two men who looked as if they were servants, speaking in a Peking accent, and giving orders to everyone else.

Chin Chün went past to the cashier's office, collected his key, and took the opportunity to ask who the baggage belonged to. The cashier replied: "Some people who have come from the capital. I have heard that they are going overseas. All these people are their attendants."

Chin Chün asked no more, and when he reached his apartment he went straight to sleep.

Next morning, as he got up, he decided to hold a party to return hospitality to Hsüeh Fu-jen and the others. When he was dressed, he went to find Lu Jen-hsiang, and invited him to go out with him, and sent out invitations for dinner at the Family Spring restaurant that same evening.

The next few days were spent in a round of drinking and eating, including a number of parties with courtesans. They went once to a Japanese tea-house, and they twice saw the Cellini circus.

When the day came for the flower show at the British Consulate, Chin Chün and Lu Jen-hsiang went there by horse-cab. They followed the Bund to Hamberley Road, and at the entrance to the gardens by the rear gate they saw four policemen. Several dozen cabs were stopped on the grass beside the road, and there was a Westerner there selling tickets. Chin Chün and Lu Jen-hsiang each paid a dollar and followed the crowd inside.

They walked among green foliage and delicate growth, with bushes on either side mingling their branches. They turned several corners and then, suddenly, they came upon a tall building, in Western style, with metal-barred windows on every side, and a number of Chinese and Westerners leaning out of them, gazing around. By the entrance doors, parked in racks with black railings, there was a row of bicycles.

The visitors went on in, and they trod on French carpet, two inches thick and soft under their feet. All around them and above them were banks and screens of flowers, innumerable Chinese and Western blooms, strange shapes and varied forms, arrayed in every kind of vase and

bowl. Every one was identified with a number tag, but all were in Western writing, so they were quite unintelligible.

Among all the others, one particular flower was set up high in a place of honour. The blossom was as big as a plate, a brilliant pink in colour, quite incomparable in its splendour. The pistils hung down on four sides like tassels, and all around there were bright green leaves, spread out as wide as the wheel of a carriage. The smaller flowers set around this great one looked like courtiers about their ruler.

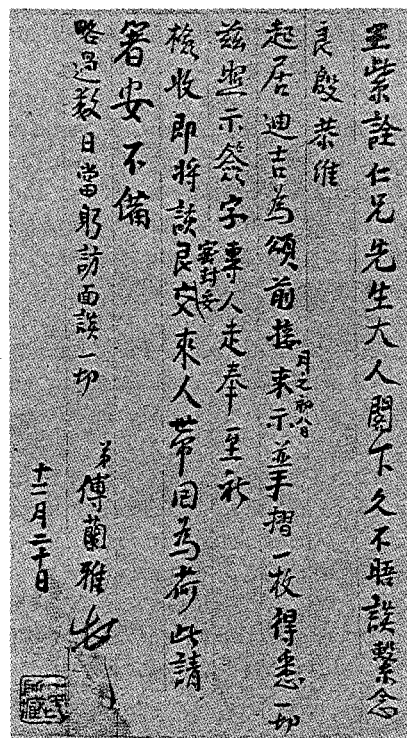
The two friends asked one of the people standing beside them what was the meaning of the Western writing, and he told them that this great blossom was the Victoria flower, named for the Queen of England.

Chin Chün and Lu Jen-hsiang went on to inspect the Chinese plants. The most popular was the great red peony of Yangchow, with a great number of examples on display. Besides these, there were orchids and roses, and a great section of the display was dominated by the Japanese cherries, rippling with colour, in an area of their own.

They had wandered now past the main exhibition area, and in a corner at the rear there was a spiral stairway. The two men climbed up, and there was a refreshment area, crowded with people, sitting down to eat foreign-style cakes and drinking coffee. There they happened to see Li Pao-feng and Ma Chung-chien, chatting with two other older men, and one Westerner with them. When the party saw Chin Chün and his companion, they all stood up and invited them to join them. The usual polite enquiries were made, and the Westerner was introduced as Fu-lan-ya (Fryer). He spoke excellent Chinese. Of the two older men, one was named Li Jen-shu, the other was Hsü Hsüeh-ts'en.



FU-LAN-YA (John Fryer), dressed as a Chinese official.



A LETTER FROM FU-LAN-YA to his Chinese friend Wang T'ao.

The two newcomers sat down. Far away now there could be heard organ-music and singing. Brought by the wind, the sounds came thin and soft, and the listeners, hearing it, were moved to thoughts of far-off lands.

Hsü Hsüeh-ts'en asked Fu-lan-ya whether there was a reception or a dance that evening. Fu-lan-ya replied: "The consul has sent out invitations for about one hundred people. Of your own countrymen, he has invited the Intendant of Shanghai, the Superintendent of the Arsenal, and a millionaire from Hangchow, Mr. Hu Hsing-yen. There are two other men; it is said that they are being sent overseas by your emperor, that they will be accompanying the American minister, Burlingame, and they are going to negotiate with a number of countries that have treaties with China. They have booked passage to Japan with the steamer come from Hong Kong, and they will then go across the Pacific to America. One of the two men is the Intendant Chih-kang, a Manchu, and the other is a departmental secretary, Sun Chia-ku. This is the first occasion that any people from your country have been sent on a mission overseas. They arrived in Shanghai the day before yesterday, and they will probably leave here in the sixth month."

Hearing this, Chin Chün thought to himself it was no wonder that he had seen so many people at the hotel a few days ago. They must have been the men going overseas. He thought of them with some envy.

Time passed in talking, and it began to grow late. The gathering broke up, and each went his way.

THE DAYS flowed past like a stream, and soon the Dragon Boat Festival was over. Chin Chün at last returned with Lu Jen-hsiang to Soochow.

Coming back with such honours to his home was surely the greatest experience of a man's life. His house was brilliant with lanterns hanging in festoons, and a band of drums and pipes played in triumphant welcome. The local officials came in full regalia to make an escort, and friends and relatives rode in sedan chairs to attend him. The people coming and going thronged the streets and flowed past his gate.

When Chin Chün arrived, everyone pressed to talk to him. People came up in the street to offer their congratulations, and even complete strangers would greet him like an old friend. Those who had never shown any affection for him in the past were now quite exceptionally attentive. Sometimes indeed he felt rather like the great hero Hsiang Yü, of ancient times, besieged by the press of men in his last battle. It was very hard to break through the lines of well-wishers that opposed him, and to escape from the open reception hall to his private rooms. Only there was he at last able to greet his mother, the Lady Chao, and his wife, the Lady Chang.

Naturally, they smiled to see him, and the entire household made merry and rejoiced. But just as he had sat down to tell of his experiences, the old servant Chin Sheng came in to say: "The respected gentlemen Ch'ien Tuan-min and Ho T'ai-chen, together with Mr. Ts'ao Yi-piao who has just lately arrived from Ch'ang-chou, are all waiting for you outside. I beg that you will come out to meet them."

When Chin Chün learnt that they had come, he was quite overjoyed, and he gave orders that Chin Sheng should invite them to sit in the inner library. For ten years, Chin Chün and Ts'ao Yi-piao had been friends in time of trouble, and with Ch'ien Tuan-min and Ho T'ai-chen they were known as the Four Friends of the Sea Voyage.

One may well ask where this name came from. It dated back to the last years of the Hsien-feng Emperor, at the time of the troubles in 1860. Peace talks with the foreigners had just concluded and the court was proposing that the emperor might return to the capital, in order to settle and soothe the hearts of the people. At that time there was a suggestion to hold the provincial triennial examinations at Peking. The area of Soochow and Ch'ang-chou was still in the hands of the Taiping rebels, and they were fighting a last-ditch battle with the Ch'ing army. Everywhere, the officials and the gentry had fled and scattered. However, those scholars who could gain a place in

the official examinations felt as if they had been granted a new life; as soon as they heard the news that the examinations would begin once more, they paid no attention to the armed camps around them but thought only of trying their luck at Peking. Chin Chün had also been one of these.

At that time, he was living as a refugee in Shanghai, and his mother told him that he should go to the capital to take the examinations. This, however, was extremely difficult: the land route was completely blocked, and there was as yet no regular steamship service. The only passage available was on a cargo ship, which was also prepared to take a few passengers. We can imagine the trouble that Chin Chün had to arrange his voyage. When he went on board, he met unexpectedly with Ch'ien Tuan-min, Ho T'ai-chen and Ts'ao Yi-piao. They talked together, and discovered that they all came from the same district and that they all held the same ambition. They were all young together, and their thoughts were set on the same goal; in the difficulties and dangers of the road they gave help to one another, and they naturally became increasingly close. As a result, on the ship, they became sworn brothers.

Later, when they came to the capital, with other friends they formed a literary society called the Society of Brilliance, and they concentrated on the composition of formal eight-legged essays. Every month they would arrange a meeting and hold a competition amongst themselves. At first, they were simply concerned with preparation for the examinations, and they sought only to assist one another in their efforts to qualify. As it happened, however, after the great disturbances in the empire, fine literature was in a state of decline, and it came about that young men such as these, who brought their talents to fruition and displayed their brilliance, were a source of amazement and admiration to the people of the capital.

As soon as one of their works was completed, it was copied down everywhere, and the fame of the Society of Brilliance shone more brightly every day. All the candidates for the examinations came to imitate them, and to all intents and purposes they were the arbiters of fashion in their time.

Ts'ao Yi-piao was the outstanding member of the society. His literary writings were different to those of everyone else, for he did not compose his essays in the usual form, but quoted freely from the works of the classics, the histories and the philosophers. He put all these into his essays, and by doing so he demolished the style of the traditional writers, noticeably those of the schools of Kiangsi and Sungkiang, which had dominated the field since the time of the Ming dynasty. Alone, he planted the banner of a new independence. Sometimes his style was simple and strong, firm and clear, sometimes it was broad and deep, wide and generous. Kung P'ing, tutor to the emperor, saw his work, and he slapped the table and exclaimed: "I would never have believed that the style of the late Ming could appear again in the present day." He acted as a patron, and encouraged the members of the society to publish their manuscripts. From then on, the scripts of the Society of Brilliance 'moved without legs' and spread through the empire, like the lyric verse of Liu Yung. In every village and township there was a copy of the Scripts of the Society of Brilliance in use as a text-book, and not one scholar was ignorant of the fame of Ts'ao Yi-piao.

Over the years, the friends of the Society of Brilliance had soared one by one upwards in their careers, and had all entered the imperial service. Only Ts'ao Yi-piao remained behind. Even now, he was still no more than a university student. Some people might deride him as a man who had achieved success with his talents, but was a failure in life. He had, however, a simple, dispassionate nature, and the question of his own name and reputation never entered his thoughts. On the other hand, he could not bear to disappoint the hopes of his widowed mother, and so whenever the time of the triennial examinations came around, he would follow the rest to go to the halls.

On the present occasion, when he heard that Chin Chün was coming south with such great success, and that he would soon be back at his home, he took it in mind to join Ch'ien Tuan-min and Ho T'ai-chen, and to accompany him when he returned once more to the capital. Naturally, Ts'ao was inspired also by the thought of Peking. So he came especially from Ch'ang-chou, partly

in order to take the opportunity of re-uniting their old fellowship, but at the same time to arrange to join the party on the road to Peking. He went first to find Ch'ien and Ho, and all three went to call upon Chin Chün.

Chin Chün was delighted to see them, and his friends gave him their warmest congratulations. Chin Chün made a modest reply. He still met Ch'ien and Ho quite regularly, but he had not seen Ts'ao for several years, and he welcomed him so much the more eagerly. They were all invited to sit down, and the page-boy was sent to bring some tea.

Chin Chün looked at Ts'ao Yi-piao. He still appeared to be doing well. His face was smooth and round, his eyebrows were fine and his eyes were clear; he seemed in good health. His age was now about thirty, but he had still not let his hair grow long. He was wearing an old white gown of coarse cotton, with a bright blue riding jacket over the top. He carried a fan of eagles' feathers, and with one hand he held a snuff-box made from white jade. All the time he was seated, he was continually taking snuff, and his nostrils and upper lip were covered in little pimples.

He smiled at Chin Chün and said: "You have come a long way. Not only have you fulfilled the ambitions of your friends, you have also brought glory to your native place. When the news came of your success, I was so pleased I couldn't sleep."

"Friend Ts'ao," replied Chin Chün, "you're making fun of me. Among all the four of us, you are the finest scholar and the best writer, and I am the least of our company. It is unfortunate that I should have gained such a position before you, and there are many others ashamed to find themselves ahead of you."

Then he turned to Ch'ien Tuan-min and said: "I am not wanting to make a hasty criticism, but I do feel that your published essays, though they have achieved a great circulation, fall below the quality of Ts'ao's work."

"Well," said Ch'ien, "if we are talking about formal essays, apart from Ts'ao's own teacher, Master P'an Chih-shao, who is there to compare with him?"

At this, everyone continued talking cheerfully. The conversation shifted to the origins and the history of the eight-legged essay, from Wang An-shih and Su Tung-p'o, through the rival schools of the Ming period, up to the famous essayists of the Ch'ing dynasty and the exemplary scripts of their own time.

Ts'ao remarked: "In the present day, everyone takes delight in decrying the examination style, to show that they are men of culture, and those who write them are described as petty scribblers. In reality, examination essays are a form of literature like any other, and why should one despise them? In the writings of any famous man, there will always be found passages of pure reasoning, like the philosophers of Chou and Ch'in, and there are also items of romantic writing like the composers of Wei and Chin. None of these are considered inferior to the memorials of Han, the poems of T'ang, the lyrics of Sung or the plays of the Yüan period."

Ho T'ai-chen said: "I remember that in the Tao-kuang period (1826-1850) Liang Chang-chü followed the style of poetic criticism and composed a *Critique of Examination Essays*, describing in the greatest detail the origins and development of these works, and Ch'ien Mei-ch'i also imitated the *Anthologies of T'ang Essays* and compiled a work of a hundred chapters containing the successful examination essays over many generations. It was entitled *Selected Essays*, but it has unfortunately never been printed. These men would certainly agree with Yi-piao here."

Ch'ien Tuan-min said: "The creation of the examination style is attributed to Wang An-shih, but it really began with Han Yü. If you don't believe me, you have only to make a careful study of his essay *On Slander*."

But before Ch'ien had finished all he had to say Lu Jen-hsiang pushed in from outside. "You've become a maniac for research," he exclaimed. "Eight-legged essays are nothing more than a stepping stone to employment. There's no reason to analyse them in such finicking detail. What I am afraid of now is that everyone has forgotten about the party arranged this evening—a welcome for Chin Chün at the house of Forest of Love Ch'u."

VISITING SING-SONG GIRLS
(a Tien-shih Studio lithograph).



"Of course," said Ch'ien. "When we all saw Yi-piao, we started off talking about the essays, and if it hadn't been for you reminding us we might have forgotten about the party completely."

Chin Chün gave an expression of surprise: "Tuan-min and T'ai-chen, you surely haven't been drinking with sing-song girls. When did you become so sophisticated?"

"I would have said that once," answered Ts'ao Yi-piao, "but now I know Forest of Love Ch'u, and she's more than just a prostitute. She can sing the classical songs and she can compose lyric poems. She's like someone out of the *Romance of the Courtesans*. Besides all this, her boudoir is full of old bronzes and old paintings and old ink-stands, and she is a lady connoisseur! That is why Tuan-min and T'ai-chen propose to start the evening off by going to her house so that they can have a look for themselves."

Ho T'ai-chen said: "We four will be the hosts. This is a party to help you brush away the dust of your travels. There won't be any outsiders. How about it?"

"Can it be," asked Chin Chün, "that this Forest of Love Ch'u is the runaway concubine of Kung Hsiao-ch'i? You were talking about it when we were in Shanghai. And now she's in the Lane of Three Taoist Immortals Monastery?"

Lu Jen-hsiang nodded.

"Then I shall certainly come. But let me ask you now to have some lunch with me here. When we've finished, you go on first. I shall wait until my other guests have left and then I'll come on after you."

So saying, he ordered his servants to prepare a separate table in his study, and he invited his four friends to order whatever they liked. He himself went out to receive the visitors who came to offer their congratulations. Not very long, and the other four had finished their meal and went on their way. Chin Chün stayed on in his reception rooms till the sun went down, dealing with swarms of friends and well-wishers. When he had got the last of them out the gate, he called up a small sedan-chair and told the bearers to take him to the house of Forest of Love Ch'u.

When he got down from the chair and looked at the gateway, it had not the slightest appearance of a prostitute's quarters. On the doorpost was a notice saying 'The Residence of Mr. Wang from Hangchow' in large letters on a red sheet.

As Chin Chün stood uncertainly outside, however, one servant came out with a lantern, asked him who he was, and led him in through the gate. In the dim light, he passed along a winding stone-flagged path, while on either side he could see the shadowy forms of great stone terraces, planted with masses of shrubs and flowers, green and fragrant. The path came to an end, and he saw in front of him a small house, single-storied, with one main room and a smaller one at each side. Inside there were bright lights and the sound of talking and laughter.

As Chin Chün arrived, someone inside called out that a visitor was coming, and the door-curtain was raised for him. As he went in, he saw in front of him a young woman, about twenty years old, quietly dressed with only a light make-up. This was Forest of Love Ch'u. She smiled and came to welcome him.

Chin Chün looked at her in amazement, for he recognised her face. All he could hear was the music of her voice as she said to him: "Master Chin, please sit down," and the sound of her words enchanted him.

Even as he wondered to himself where he had seen her before, Chin Chün entered the little house. The main room was elegantly furnished as a study, with a table under the window and a mahogany table on the brick-bed. Above the brick-bed was hung a line drawing of a Taoist fairy. There was no signature or inscription, but it was evidently the work of the old imperial academy. On either side of the room there were small chairs and occasional tables made from tree stumps, twisted and carved in most elegant fashion. In the centre of the room was an old table, with a surface of purple-veined marble from Yunnan. On the table were set out bronze bowls, jade carvings and albums of paintings. Ch'ien, Ho, Ts'ao and Lu sat around the table and admired the treasures.

"Come and see, Chin Chün," said Ho T'ai-chen. "Here are some bronze wine-cups from the Shang period. And here is a tripod with seal writing."

"This sacrificial vessel here," said Ch'ien Tuan-min, "dates from the Han; and this tripod is really superb."

"The things that please me most," remarked Ts'ao Yi-piao, "are the brick rubbings from the Six Dynasties period. Most of them are quite unknown."

Chin Chün glanced over the collection and observed: "It is easy to see our hostess's good taste, and a pleasure for my eyes." He went on into one of the side rooms and sat in a huge chair which was set in front of a writing desk next to a window. He picked up a small inkstand with a water-container shaped like a delicate eyebrow from a box made of fragrant cedar, and he caressed it in his hand. But his eyes were fixed on Forest of Love Ch'u.

Lu Jen-hsiang laughed: "You see our hostess. How does she compare with your old friend at Chefoo?"

Forest of Love gave an enchanting smile and said: "Master Lu should not speak so foolishly. To compare me with Sister New Swallow is like comparing chicken shit to Heaven. Don't you agree, Master Chin?"

Chin Chün blushed violently. His heart gave a jump, and he replied to Forest of Love: "You must be Precious Pearl Fu. How have you come here to Soochow, calling yourself Forest of Love Ch'u?"

Forest of Love replied: "Master Chin you have a good memory. It is such a long time ago, and I only saw you once, and I could not believe it was you again. How is Sister New Swallow now? She is surely enjoying your good fortune, and her love for you is fulfilled."

Chin Chün answered rather shamefacedly: "She came to Peking once, but I was terribly busy and I didn't get to see her. Later on, she went back home, and I haven't heard any news of her since."

Forest of Love, in amazement, asked him again: "But now that you've graduated and come to such high rank, haven't you married her?"

"Actually," said Chin Chün, now turning rather pale, "I would appreciate it if you would not talk any more about the old days in Chefoo. I asked you how you came to change your name to Forest of Love Ch'u. And I've heard people say that you were in Kung Hsiao-ch'i's house and you left there. All these antiques and curios that you have, don't they come from Kung's collection?"

Miserably, Forest of Love asked Chin Chün to sit down beside her, and explained: "Master Chin, you and I are no strangers to one another, and I can tell you the truth. I did come from Hsiao-ch'i, but when people say that I stole things and run away, that is absolutely untrue and unfair. Really, it is simply that Hsiao-ch'i was utterly poor and completely ruined, and very reluctantly he sent us away. As for these things, he gave them to us for remembrance. You think about it, Master Chin: if I had stolen them, would I dare to set them out like this for everyone to see?"

"Was Hsiao-ch'i as badly off as that?" asked Chin Chün.

"Hsiao-ch'i's a curious fellow," she replied. "That's why he got into such a mess. People used to see him looking so well-off, treating gold as if it was dirt, and he seemed like a young prince with a tremendous family behind him. In fact, he was a young waster with no family at all. He quarrelled with his father over some silly point in the classics, and he hardly ever went home. He has an elder brother whom he never writes to, and he doesn't care for his wife and children. As a matter of fact, he has never taken a cent from his own family. All day and every day Hsiao-ch'i was either in bed with some prostitute who speaks the Soochow dialect, or studying Mongolian and Tangut, or practising archery and horse-riding with some Central Asian people. All his money came from a friend called Yang Mo-lin. Then Yang died, and he was lucky enough to meet up with the English minister, Sir Thomas Wade. He became his private secretary, and that kept him in funds for a few more years. Just lately though, I don't know why, he's quarrelled with Wade and he isn't getting any more money. Now he spends all his time selling his collection of paintings and curios. Because of this, he has taken for himself the literary name of 'Half Morality', meaning that he ignores all the five moral relationships of family, country and friends, and all he cares about is me. While I was his mistress, he gave all his affection to this half-relationship. Now he can't even manage that."

As she spoke, her eyes were wet with tears.

"He sacrificed everything," said Chin Chün. "He handed himself over to Wade and he was a traitor to China. Obviously he only did it for the money. How could he quarrel then with him?"

"Everyone cursed him for a traitor," agreed Forest of Love, "but he wouldn't accept that. Some people praised him as a revolutionary, but he wouldn't accept that either. When he suggested burning the Summer Palace, he told me once that all he wanted to do was to avenge his father."

"Avenge his father," said Chin Chün in amazement. "What ever happened to his father?"

Forest of Love brought her chair closer, pressed her lips to Chin Chün's ear, and spoke to him in a low voice. "I'll explain it to you exactly the way he told it to me. That was about a month before I left him, and at that time we had nothing in the house and nothing in his purse, and he was in a very bad temper. One moment he would kick the furniture in despair, and the next he would be raging against Heaven and Earth and his miserable luck. I had got used to all this, and I let him do and say what he liked.

"One evening, he went into his study quietly and I couldn't hear a sound. I was a bit worried about it, so I walked on tiptoe outside the door and listened. From inside the room I heard a tapping noise, followed by a sound of murmuring. I listened a moment longer, then two taps sounded again and another lot of whispering. What could it be? I couldn't bear it any longer, so I pushed my way in, but all I could see was Hsiao-ch'i, sitting up at his desk with a most serious expression on his face. Spread out in front of him was a pile of green-lined paper, covered with

"From inside the room I heard a tapping noise"



straggling columns of grass-writing, and at the side was a bare wooden funeral tablet. In one hand he was holding a writing brush with vermilion ink, and in the other he held a short, thick rod. He was just about to hit the tablet with the rod when he noticed me come in. He turned his head and asked me: "What are you doing here?"

"I laughed at him, saying: 'I heard the sound of your tapping from outside, and I couldn't imagine what you might be doing. And here you are banging away on somebody's funeral tablet. Whose is it?'"

"This is the tablet of my late father,' he answered.

"Your father's tablet?' I said in surprise. 'But what's the point of banging it about?'"

"My father wasn't like anyone else's father. My father was a great man who gained his great name under false pretences. Even if I despise him myself, there are hundreds of his admirers everywhere. They admire his most revolting behaviour, they consider it attractive and righteous, and they would even praise the perfume of his farts. I am trying at the moment to arrange his collected works for publication, but there are a number of things that are utter rubbish, or confusing and misleading at the very least. I want to get them absolutely right for him, so that he may leave no errors to posterity. He always used to correct my writing, and whenever he found a mistake he would beat me. Now it's my turn, tit for tat—that's the way things go. I've got his tablet here, and whenever I come across a slight mistake I give it a tap, when there is something deliberately misleading I bang it twice, and when there's something just plain wrong, I hit it three times. So I get a little of my own back for the past.'

"But how,' I asked him, 'can anyone enjoy getting revenge against his father this way?'"

"He laughed and said: 'I have already taken a great revenge on his behalf, and he must have got pleasure out of it. I am quite sure that he will be patient if I play tricks on him now.'

"What was the revenge that you took for your father?'"

"Very seriously, he answered: 'You think my father died a natural death, don't you? But he was actually poisoned at Tanyang by some Manchu. My father and I both have the same weakness: we like going to bed with women. All his life he looked for them, and I shouldn't think that

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KU-T'AI-CH'ING, the original of Purity, Lord Ming-shan's concubine.

there was a single female, from prince's concubine to the beggar-girl in the street, that he didn't get into at one time or another. The time he was assistant at the Office of the Imperial Clan, the man in charge of the office was Lord Ming-shan, a great prince with more than usual ability. Ming-shan's concubine was called Purity and Spring of the Western Forest. She was very beautiful and talented, and she wrote poetry in her chamber. She could reply to other's writings, and her own pieces were well known. Ming-shan's collected lyrics were called *Woodcutters' Songs of the Western Hill*. Purity produced a collection called *Fisherman's Songs of the Eastern Sea*. It was all very romantic, and they thought of themselves as the equals to the great calligrapher Chao Meng-fu and his wife the Lady Kuan.

"Ming-shan always treated my father as an honoured guest, and they would drink together until their ears were on fire, but although my father sometimes exchanged poetry with Purity, he never had an opportunity to get a good look at her. One day, however, there was some official business, and Ming-shan had gone away to the Western Hills. My father went out to fetch him. That day, it had been snowing very hard, and he caught sight of Ming-shan and Purity as they came riding together from a grove of trees. Underneath, Purity was dressed in Manchu costume, but to go out in the cold she had put on a scarlet cape. She shone against the snow, brilliant on the dazzling white, charming and graceful, and my father fell in love with her at once.

"From that time on, all his nights were spent in thinking of her, and he was ready to die for love. Yet there was no magic messenger to carry a letter for him, and no kind friend to act as a go-between, so he could do nothing but keep his feelings to himself.

"At last, however, his chance came. He met her unexpectedly as he was strolling in a temple market. My father saw that Ming-shan was not accompanying her, and he ran up to her and spoke to her in Mongolian. Purity answered him with a smile. He was about to leave her, when she whispered to him: 'Tomorrow at dusk, at the tea-house outside the Eastern Suburb Gate.' My father thought that she would meet him there, and his joy knew no bounds.

"The next day, with no thought of the consequences, he walked out the Eastern Suburb

Gate, and there, about a hundred yards away, he saw an old, small, run-down tea-house. Turning towards it, he went in and sat down and called for the waiter to bring him a pot of tea. He was sure he would have to wait a long time, but to his surprise, the waiter asked him in a low voice: 'Are you Master Kung?' My father answered yes, and the waiter led him through to an inner room, where he saw another man sitting at a table. This new figure was wearing a flat felt hat like a wagon driver's; he had heavy eyebrows and large eyes. As soon as he saw my father, he invited him politely to sit down. My father asked him, however: 'Who are you?'

"The man gave him a knowing smile and said: 'Just don't you ask about anything. You drink your tea and then we'll talk about it.'

"My father had become thirsty from his walk, and he was only too ready for something to drink. He lifted the bowl, poured himself some tea and drank more than half of it straight off. How could he have known that the tea was dangerous? But once it was inside him it sent him unconscious as if his head had spun away. . . ."

When Forest of Love had reached this point in the tale, Ch'ien Tuan-min, who was sitting at the marble table, suddenly exclaimed: "Surely Kung Ting-an wasn't poisoned unawares, just like that?"

Forest of Love replied: "If you'll stop interrupting, I'll get on with the story."

There is the couplet:

*A society is formed to promote literary fashion;
A learned scholar throws himself to death for love of a fair lady.*

But if you want to know what happened to Kung Ting-an, you will have to attend to the next chapter.

Chapter IV

*A royal princess has an evening-rendezvous
with her lover at the Bright Pavilion;
The prince of the catamites prays
for an unfortunate scholar in the moonlight.*

WE HEARD Forest of Love Ch'u telling the story of how Kung Ting-an drank some tea and became unconscious. Then Ch'ien Tuan-min interrupted her, and Forest of Love told him not to be a nuisance, the old master wasn't going to die of poisoning just yet.

Just as Forest of Love was about to go on, Ho T'ai-chen said: "Tuan-min, you must have read Kung Ting-an's collected works. The dedication to Governor Liang of Kwangsi was written at the time he was assistant at the Office of the Imperial Clan; and that was in 1836. In 1838 he compiled an index to Shang and Chou dynasty bronze inscriptions, and he added 147 ancient characters to those listed in the *Shuo-wen* dictionary. When I was to compile my own *Supplement of Old Characters in the Shuo-wen*, the idea was inspired by his extremely valuable work. How could you think that he died so early?"

"Besides," added Ts'ao Yi-piao, "there are the 315 poems of the 1839 collection. They must have been written at least two years after he was at the Office of the Imperial Clan."

Chin Chün broke in: "Look, there is no need for a lot of scholarly fuss. What are you interrupting her for? Please let's get on with the story."

So Forest of Love continued. "He said to me: 'My father lost consciousness and knew nothing more for a time. When he came to his senses, the first thing he noticed was a warm

fragrance in his nostrils, and a soft body pressed against his own. All his limbs felt weak, and he couldn't even move. He looked around, but everything was black and there was not a glimmer of light to be seen. He knew that he was not in some gloomy dungeon—on the contrary, it was a chamber of enchantment. His head was resting on an embroidered pillow, his body was covered by a quilt of fine brocade, and within the coverlet, pressed closely against him and deep in sleep, was a smooth-skinned, delicate and graceful young girl, separated from him only by blouse and pantaloons of the thinnest fine silk. There came from her a soft, intoxicating scent, entering the marrow of his bones. Plucking up his courage, he stretched out his hand and caressed her. She offered no resistance. All her flesh was smooth and soft as milk, and open to his touch.

“At that moment it came to his mind how he had often heard people say, ‘In the capital, there is a mysterious dark chariot, which often does good work for the concubines of the palace and for the wives of the great families.’ Could it be that Purity had used this sort of trick? And who could it be under the coverlet with him, if it wasn't her?”

“At this, he could no longer resist asking her name, in the softest of whispers. He spoke to her again and again, but she made no reply. Then he spoke to her in Mongol, but she still remained silent. One arm, however, smooth as jade, came gradually to touch him, and her body turned closer. No longer in control of themselves, the two joined together in the silent play of love.

“With hands embraced and feet linked together in affection, hearts and souls mingled in shared emotion, they hugged one another and sank again into sleep.

“When he woke up a second time, the first thing he heard was the crowing of a cock, and he gasped as he sat up, and thought to himself: ‘What has been going on?’ Rubbing his eyes, he gradually recovered. It seemed that he had dreamed his way through some strange experience. Yet now, here he was, waking up on the couch in his own study. Then he thought; ‘But surely it wasn't just a dream. The tea-house, the enchanted chamber, the brocaded coverlet, that beautiful girl. Could all of these have been no more than dreams?’

“He called hurriedly for someone to come. When the servant came in, he asked him: ‘What time did I come in last night?’ The servant told him that he had gone out in the evening and had not returned until day-break that morning. He had been sent home in a carriage from Prince Ming-shan's house, so drunk that he couldn't even see. His servants had half-carried, half-dragged him up to his bed.

“When my father heard the man say this, he realised at once that everything which had happened the night before had been planned by Purity. He was naturally delighted, though he did wonder how she had managed to drug him so unconscious and how she had arranged to get him home. The more he thought about it the more confused he became, and he realised very clearly that he could certainly be in love with Purity, but he would also need to be fairly cautious in dealing with her.

“A few days later, as he was strolling among the curio shops in Liu-li Ch'ang, he saw Purity once again. When she caught sight of him, she gave him an affectionate smile. He looked at her carefully. She had no men-servants about her, only a small slave-girl, showing clearly that she had come out especially to look for him. All the same, her bearing was very formal and quite intimidating.

“He plucked up his courage and went to talk to her. Speaking still in Mongolian, and very circuitously, he asked her whether she had indeed spent that night with him. Purity laughed, but did not reply. Then, as he questioned her more closely, she said to him, ‘Supposing it had been me, what would you do about it?’

“Then I should rank myself with the immortals’, he replied. ‘But the arts of such an enchantress are too great, and a man who is lifted into the clouds must always be a little bit afraid.’

“Purity laughed. ‘If you are afraid, then don't come again!’

“He laughed in reply. ‘I shall come even if it proves my death.’

“And then the two of them flirted affectionately, and Purity at last confessed her true feelings. She promised, moreover, that on the night of the ninth day of the sixth month, when her lord Ming-shan would be away on government business, she would come to meet him. Their rendezvous was set in the Bright Pavilion, in the garden of the prince’s residence.

“At this second meeting, Purity revealed all her thoughts and passions, and all her precious body. The whole time together they were in constant play of love, and from this time on they met with one another again and again amongst the moonlight and the flowers.

“But then, one day, an aged servant came with a tightly stitched package. Inside it was a letter, in Purity’s own fine handwriting:

We have been discovered. I shall be strictly guarded.

Go quickly to the south and you may hope to escape the misfortune.

Here is a phial of poison powder. It can kill a man instantly without a trace. Put it into water, and the water will turn blue. It has a bitter taste and a horrible smell, so be careful of anything with this colour and smell and make sure to avoid it.

I am afraid that someone may try to poison you with this method.

Here, too, is a small bag with a fragrant medicine.

Hang it around your neck. It is an antidote to any drug and incense which may arrest one’s consciousness. These are both from the pharmacy at the Palace.

Begone and farewell. Take great care of yourself.

“As soon as my father read this, he set off for the south, travelling day and night. He remained there several years, in peace and quiet, and as time went by he gradually became less nervous and less alert.

“But at last, there came the time he travelled to Tanyang. In the country offices there he met a man who had been with him in the Office of the Imperial Clan. My father had been known there as a gambler, and this man knew his weakness and played *fantan* with him for two nights on end. The second night, as he came home to his lodgings, he felt a little sick. Then he realised, too late, that the wine he had drunk had an unusually pungent smell. He knew that he had fallen into the trap, and had been poisoned.

“On his deathbed, he told me the whole story, and asked me to avenge him. Even though he had never treated me particularly well, he was, after all, my father, and so I hold an undying purpose, for revenge against the Manchus.

“At the time of the 1860 troubles, when I helped Sir Thomas Wade, what I really hoped to do was to overthrow the Ch’ing dynasty of the Manchus, and to kill all Prince Ming-shan’s descendants. Even though I did not accomplish all that I wanted, we did burn the Summer Palace, and I think that I fulfilled my filial duties. People can call me a traitor, or they can say that I am a rebel against the Manchus; I couldn’t care less.”

“This is what Hsiao-ch’i told me himself, and I believe it’s true. As for my own opinion of Hsiao-ch’i, I think that he’s a strange fellow, but he treats people honestly, and if he did send us away it was only because he was absolutely broke. I wasn’t the only one to leave. There is also a girl named Wang. She was his second concubine, and she’s living here too. He gave us all these things, and even now we’re always getting letters to ask how we’re getting on. Miss Wang has some private savings of her own, so she doesn’t receive guests. If I could help it, I would never have brought dishonour to him myself.

“The reason I had the name Precious Pearl Fu in the past is that when I was in Chefoo I took the surname of my foster-mother. Ch’u is my real surname, and Forest of Love is the name I was given as a child. My formal personal name is Fragrant Garden.

“Everyone,” she concluded, “accuses me of being a thief and a runaway. Master Chin, don’t you think that’s unfair?”

Chin Chün had listened carefully to her story, and now he turned to the others and smiled: “The proverb puts it well: ‘People who share a bed together will always support one another.’ You

heard what Forest of Love has said. Doesn't she defend Hsiao-ch'i beautifully?"

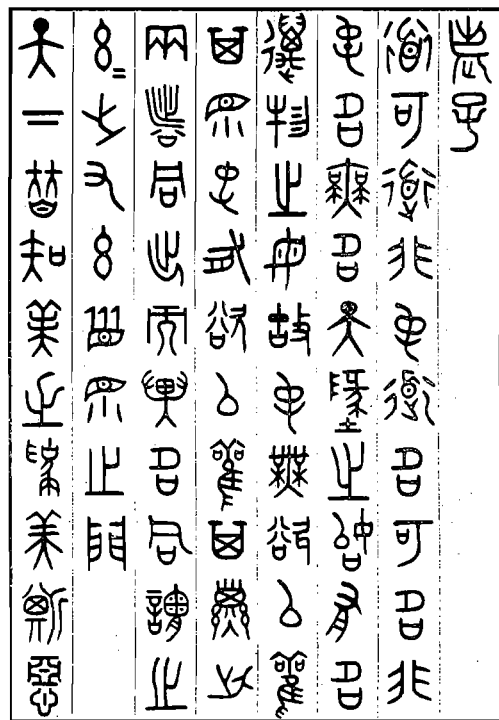
"Though Hsiao-ch'i's conduct is hardly an example for others," replied Ch'ien Tuan-min, "all the same, when you hear his argument, it is certainly a remarkable one. And surely that is just the way Kung Ting-an was."

"That man Kung Ting-an," added Ts'ao Yi-piao, "he had a great deal to do with the development of academic thought. Whenever I have occasion to praise the scholarship of our dynasty, claiming that it is in fact superior to T'ang and Sung and Yüan and Ming, the reason is that it encourages men to think for themselves. If you consider it properly, then you can see that over the last two hundred years there have been three main periods.

"The first period was that of the pioneers, when the great Confucian scholars such as Ku Yen-wu, Yen Jo-chü, Hui Tung and Tai Chen produced their text criticism. Item by item they examined every text, and whenever they discussed a point they would refuse to rely even upon the words of the sages unless they were satisfied by the evidence which was available to support the argument.

"The second period was the time of adjustment, and that was the work of the Ch'ien-lung and Chia-ch'ing scholars Pi Yüan, Juan Yüan, Sun Hsing-yen, Hung Liang-chi, Ch'ien Ta-hsin, Wang Nien-sun, Tuan Yü-ts'ai and Kuei Fu. They collated and added supplementary work to the classics, philosophy and histories; and the ancient texts, hitherto unexplained, are now intelligible.

"The third period is the time of research, when we use the texts as corrected by the earlier scholars, and carry their work one stage further. We seek out the real meaning of these writings. In this way, such men as Wei Yüan and Kung Ting-an have developed most original ideas and quite amazing arguments. To my way of thinking this is only the beginning. In a few years time, I suspect that we may see the ancient debates of the philosophers during the Warring States and later period renewed in the present day. The development of scholarship in our dynasty may return to the direct line of Chou and Ch'in, and will bypass and surpass Han and all the other dynasties since that time."



THE OPENING WORDS OF LAO-TZU 老子, in the seal calligraphy of Wu Ta-ch'eng, the original of Ho T'ai-chen.

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BARGE OF THE SHANGHAI MAGISTRATE
(from *La Chine et les Chinois*, Paris, 1877).

"In the study of epigraphy," observed Ho T'ai-chen, "we begin to pay far more attention to the social life of the past and do not restrict ourselves to problems of authentication."

Everyone now broke into a general conversation until dinner was brought in. Chin Chün was naturally accorded the place of honour, and the others sat around the table in order of seniority after him. When the wine had been passed around three times and one candle after another had burnt to the base and guttered out, they began to mourn the past and discuss the present. They marvelled at historical happenings and the famous literary pieces related to them, and compared their opinions. They got drunk and told jokes. It was an occasion to remember, and a source of literary anecdotes in years to come. Only when the night was quite gone did the party break up.

As we have seen, when Ts'ao Yi-piao came to Soochow, he did so because he wanted to travel to the capital with Chin Chün, Ch'ien Tuan-min and Ho T'ai-chen. The next day, the friends all met once more, and Ts'ao explained his plans to Chin Chün. Chin Chün naturally agreed. He knew that Ts'ao Yi-piao wanted to attempt the *chü-jen* examinations at Peking, and that he needed to be there by the eighth month. Fortunately, when he had applied for his leave of absence, Chin Chün had received permission to visit his family and then escort his wife back to Peking. He had no other business in Soochow, and so he readily agreed that they could go back to the north together. Each was to make his own arrangements for the journey, and they agreed to meet in Shanghai.

A month passed quickly by, and when it was the first week of the seventh month, and the heat of summer was already past, and the air had become fresh and cool, then Chin Chün said farewell to his parents and set off north with his wife. Ch'ien Tuan-min and Ho T'ai-chen also brought their wives with them. Ts'ao Yi-piao travelled carefree and lightly laden, with very little luggage and only two page boys. The whole party came to Shanghai and boarded the steamer, and

with a speedy passage they reached Peking in less than ten days. Chin Chün, Ch'ien Tuan-min and Ho T'ai-chen, needless to say, had arranged in advance for their lodgings. Each of them invited Ts'ao Yi-piao to stay with him. Ts'ao was rather embarrassed, and so he made a point of taking lodgings for himself, staying at the P'i-ling Hostel on Shun-chih Gate High Street. From here, he went regularly to see Chin Chün and the others, and they also called on him.

Kuo Chao-t'ing had been in Peking for some time already, and all the friends were constantly going to and fro with a bustle of excitement. The majority of these men had been leading lights in the Society of Brilliance, but by this time, when they returned once again to the capital, their ideas had broadened, their scholarship was quite different, and they no longer cared for the style of the eight-legged essays. Whenever they met, if they weren't discussing philology, or the classics and histories, they were quite prepared to talk about poetry and classical prose, and when they weren't criticising wood-block editions, they were perfectly ready to look for curios and inscriptions.

Chin Chün was concerned to extend his knowledge of foreign affairs and he read steadily through the *Outline Geography of the World* by Hsü Chi-yü, *Recollections of the South Sea Islands* by Ch'en Lun-chiung, and the *Illustrated Treatise of the Maritime Kingdoms* of Wei Yüan. With this knowledge and interest, he gained increasing respect from the authorities. He was the regular guest of two ministers, P'an Tsung-yin, who came from his own town Soochow, and also Kung P'ing, from Changshu. These eminent men encouraged and praised Chin Chün and his fellows, and because of his interest in foreign affairs, he became acquainted with many other prominent officials.

TWO YEARS LATER, Lu Jen-hsiang also graduated from the final examinations, and he too became *chuang-yüan*, taking first place from all the candidates in the empire. He and Chin Chün were now equal in glory, and Lu called his wife to join him in Peking.

Only Ts'ao Yi-piao, who had now attempted the examinations twice, had failed each time. He was planning to go back to his home in the south, but Chin Chün and the others persuaded him to remain a while longer at the capital. He agreed, and went so far as to buy himself a secretarial position at the Board of Rites. It was not that he was looking for money or position; it was simply that he enjoyed being with his friends.

Ts'ao Yi-piao then remained quietly at the capital, attending to his official duties. He became quite a man about town, maintaining his interest in scholarly pursuits, and he went to the theatre and patronised the sing-song girls. His elegant and solitary life passed very contentedly.

In a fairly short time, that is to say in the space of another year, there came once more the due date for the autumn examinations, in the first week of the eighth month. One evening, as the fresh feel of autumn was in the air, and Chin Chün was sitting idly by himself in his study, a soft breeze, scented strongly by the blossoms of the cassia tree, pushed through the hanging screens at his window. Chin Chün looked up, but he saw only the cold bright moon, just risen above the willow trees outside.

At that moment, the thought came to him that this was the last day before Ts'ao Yi-piao's examinations. He knew that Ts'ao was a carefree fellow and that he did not pay sufficient attention to detail. It now occurred to him that since Ts'ao was living alone in Peking, there would be no one to attend him and see he had the writing materials and other things that he would need for the period of the examination. Chin Chün had always been fond of Ts'ao, so now he quickly gathered together several brushes, inkstone and packages of paper, and other things useful to a scholar, and he had his wife, the Lady Chang, prepare some cakes and other delicacies. When everything was ready, he called a carriage and went himself to call on Ts'ao Yi-piao, to help him get himself organised.

As he arrived at the door of Ts'ao's hostel, however, he saw outside a light, fast carriage, drawn by a small chestnut horse, with its mane clipped and trimmed. From the entrance of the

lodging-house there appeared a young man of fifteen or sixteen, a dashing figure, robed in dazzling colours. He jumped into the cabin and let down the curtains, the driver clicked his tongue, and the carriage flew on its way down the street.

Chin Chün did not recognise the face, but the stranger was obviously some catamite. He wondered who it was that he had come to visit. But then he remarked to himself: "No. Who would have time today to call for a boy like that? Ah! Surely that fellow must be Chu Hsia-fen, prince of the catamites in the Hall of Bright Harmony. He is also known as Heavy Clouds, and his nickname is Little Sister-in-Law (Hsiao Piao-sao: a paternal or maternal cousin's wife). Kuo Chao-t'ing has told me that he has some connection with Ts'ao Yi-piao. His friends have made a joke about him, for since the characters of Ts'ao's given name include *piao*, everyone now calls him Little Sister-in-law. This must be where the nickname comes from. And presumably that is why he has come to visit Ts'ao Yi-piao at this time, to wish him luck with the examinations."

As he was working all this out, Chin Chün had got down from his cab and moved inside. A porter offered to announce him, but Chin Chün said, "No need," and went straight in to the suite of rooms where Ts'ao Yi-piao was lodging. He climbed the steps and called out: "Yi-piao, are you hiding from us and enjoying yourself all on your own?"

Ts'ao was wearing a light linen jacket, and he came lazily from the bedroom to greet his guest: "There's no need to shout like that, whether I'm all on my own or not!" Chin Chün laughed and said: "Who is it that just left you?"

"Now I see what you mean," said Ts'ao, laughing loudly in reply. "You thought you had found out my secret. But it's just as you see, that boy called Heavy Clouds. I never hide this from anyone."

"If you say you don't hide him," replied Chin Chün, "then why have you never asked me to a meal at his place?"

"I shan't forget in future," promised Ts'ao. "Just wait until my examinations are over, and then of course I shall ask you to meet him."

Chin Chün laughed again and said: "When that day comes, I shall want to congratulate both of you, not only on your graduation, but also on your delightful wedding with your little sister-in-law."

"So you even know about the nickname," remarked Ts'ao, "and yet you say that I have been hiding things. But though the graduation is nothing more than a dream, the wedding is a real one. Hsia-fen is taking himself a girl. I promise you, when the exams are over, I'll invite you to his wedding feast."

"But has Heavy Clouds' master been paid off, then?" asked Chin Chün. "Who gave the money for that? And who supplied the cash for his marriage?"

Ts'ao just smiled slightly, paused a moment and then said: "'Act with emotions, control them with etiquette.' That is what the sages have said. The musician Po-ya would never play his lute again after the death of his bosom friend; the courtesan Red Duster defied law and the rituals to elope with her lover. If I have sufficient friendship for Hsia-fen, and sufficient love for him, then it is quite a natural thing for me to do."

"From what you say," observed Chin Chün, "you are a paragon of chivalry. I shall certainly be pleased to come to this wedding of his."

"But now then," and he changed the subject, "there's something else. Tomorrow morning you are going into the exams, and I came especially to wish you luck. You've never been properly organised in the past, and have you got everything you need this time? Let me look after things for you, and I think I can do a better job than your two page-boys can. My wife has made you some dishes and cakes, and I have brought them along with me too."

As he spoke, he called for his servant to bring in a small basket. Ts'ao thanked him again and again. Then he called his own servant boys, Pinetree and Cassia, to bring in a wicker basket and a small cane box, and he handed both of them to Chin Chün, saying: "I have just tossed a few

things in here. Would you be good enough to check them over for me?"

When Chin Chün opened the two containers, inside the box he saw books and a small metal stove, a curtain for the door, hangings for the walls, bedding and pillows and a hammer and nails. When he looked in the basket, it was divided into three sections, one with brushes and ink and writing paper and a knife and paste for corrections. In the middle section were fine cakes and savoury dishes, and in the upper compartment there was food, such as rice and salt and sauce and vinegar and eggs. Everything was perfectly set out, everything was right, and everything was sufficient. Unable to contain his surprise, Chin Chün exclaimed: "Who did all this for you?"

"Who else should it be but Heavy Clouds?" replied Ts'ao. "He has spent the whole day making cakes and cooking, and everything here he made with his own hands. You can see that he has something to show for all his work. But I am still afraid that he may have made a few mistakes, and perhaps it is not suitable."

"I'll be damned," said Chin Chün. "He attends you with such tremendous affection. I would never have thought that such generosity could come from those humble origins. When I think of the great loves of the past, between poets and their boyfriends, they may be compared with yours in romance, but surely not in such true affection. I can only envy you that incomparable good fortune. If I were you, and if I failed every one of my exams, I would still think myself well favoured."

Ts'ao smiled. By the time that Chin Chün had replaced the examination equipment, and had added in the brushes and ink that he had brought himself, he realised that it was getting late. He was afraid that he might be preventing Ts'ao from getting an early night's sleep. So he made his farewells, promising that he would see Ts'ao in the evening on the last day of the examinations, and then went back to his own home.

All the period of the examinations, for several days, Chin Chün saw nothing more of Ts'ao Yi-piao. He did, however, run into Kuo Chao-t'ing, and told him what he had seen at Ts'ao's lodgings. Kuo Chao-t'ing remarked: "Chu Hsia-fen is a pupil of Brilliant Fairy Mei, and he's another one of our Soochow men. That little chap has always set his sights very high, and he seldom talks to anyone else. Last month there was a country magistrate from the provinces who was prepared to give his master one thousand taels if Hsia-fen would spend one night with him. His master agreed, but not only did Hsia-fen refuse, he shouted at the magistrate and threw him out of the room. The master was furious with him. Later, I heard that someone had bought him out, but I had no idea it could be Ts'ao Yi-piao. Ts'ao has had so many failures in the exams, it is about time he had a bit of luck, to make up for all that he has missed." Everyone there sighed in agreement.

Very soon, the mid-autumn festival had passed, and Chin Chün realised that the last day of the examinations had arrived. He waited until evening, then went to collect Kuo Chao-t'ing, and the two men made their way to the hostel. As they neared the gateway, they realised that Hsia-fen's carriage, which had been there before, was not now waiting outside. Chin Chün whispered to Kuo: "I am afraid he has let him down this time. You can see that his carriage isn't there."

"He's sure to come," replied Kuo.

As they were speaking, they went inside. The doorman knew that they were friends of Ts'ao, and he made no move to ask their business. They went straight on through, to a big square courtyard. The clear moon was shining through the branches of two *wu-t'ung* trees, which reached higher than the eaves of the house. The courtyard was filled with silver bars and shadows of black. In the pattern of light and shade they could see a tea-table with a pair of lighted candles and an incense-burner with smoking sandalwood. There was someone kneeling in front of the table. Looking carefully they could see that on his head was a loose queue of hair, arranged in three braids, and anointed with perfume and oil. He was wearing a long gown of pale pinkish-purple gambiered Kwangtung gauze, and on top of that was a waistcoat of sapphire blue, worked in silver.

On his feet were a pair of green silk, embroidered shoes. The dim light falling on him, outlining him as a shadow, could not conceal the grace and enchantment of his figure. He bowed low over a cushion, and murmured a few words.

"Isn't that young Hsia-fen?" said Kuo Chao-t'ing as he pointed to him.

Chin Chün waved his hand and said: "We mustn't make a noise. You can see that he's praying, but what is he praying for?"

*Dreaming of making inquiry at the Hall of Glory and Brightness,
Unfortunate couple they are, meeting in the mundane world.*

But if you want to know what Chu Hsia-fen was saying in his prayers, you must read the next chapter.

Chapter V

*A bottle of wine is cracked thanks to a pawnbroker;
Many volumes of books on a shelf cannot hide
A Portrait of Naked Lady Grace*

WE HAVE JUST DESCRIBED how Chin Chün saw Chu Hsia-fen kneeling on a hassock praying in a low voice, and he had immediately waved Kuo Chao-t'ing to silence. The few words Kuo had already spoken, however, disturbed Chu Hsia-fen, and he hastily got to his feet. The page-boy Pinetree came from the house to invite the visitors inside.

Chin Chün and Kuo Chao-t'ing had been acquainted with Chu Hsia-fen for some time. They had met him at several parties, and Kuo knew him particularly well. As soon as Chu saw them, he came immediately to greet them: "Master Chin, Master Kuo," and he knelt on one knee as a gesture of respect.

Chin Chün looked at him in the moonlight. He was certainly very handsome, with fine eyes and perfect complexion. His face was light-boned and delicate, his shining eyes were an enticement to any man. His eyebrows were pencilled in a sensitive line, his cheeks were touched with rouge, his mouth was small, like some newly-ripe seeds of pomegranate. Anyone who saw him was immediately stirred to lust.

Chin Chün was amazed. Ts'ao Yi-piao, who cared so little for his dress and was always sloppy in appearance, and he had attracted such a companion. And he himself, champion essayist and writer, why had he not obtained some such treasure for himself?

As Chin Chün was thinking like this, Kuo Chao-t'ing took Chu Hsia-fen quickly by the hand and asked him, laughing: "You were burning incense to Heaven, for whom were you praying so piously?"

Chu blushed and smiled: "I wasn't praying for anyone. I had forgotten to burn incense for the middle of autumn, and so I was simply making up for it now."

At this, however, the page called Pinetree, who was still standing at the foot of the steps, broke in. "Master Kuo, you don't want to believe what Chu says. He was praying that our master might gain a high place in the examinations. He said: 'The *chü-jen* degree lies under the control of the Palace of the Moon. If only Wu Kang would lend a branch of the cassia tree chopped with his magical axe to our master, then surely he could graduate; for this is called 'breaking the cassia on the moon.' Since our master went to the examinations, he has been praying here every day to the moon. Look, he's got a big round bruise on his forehead from all the kowtowing."

Chu Hsia-fen gave Pinetree a most unfriendly look. He asked the two visitors to come in, however, and added as he did so: "Master Kuo, you cannot believe the lies of that little monkey. Our master finished the examinations early this morning, and he went to sleep as soon as he got home. He's been in bed ever since, and he still isn't awake, but if you two gentlemen will just sit in the study for a moment, I shall go and get him up."

Kuo Chao-t'ing laughed, and leant close to Chu Hsia-fen's cheek. "When did you become so intimate with Ts'ao Yi-piao, that he is now your 'master', like some personal property? I hadn't noticed this before."

Chu Hsia-fen looked embarrassed. In a faint attempt to explain himself, he argued: "I just followed the way that young monkey was speaking of him. But Master Kuo, if you find fault, I shan't say it any more." They went on into the main hall.

Kuo Chao-t'ing had not been there for some time. He looked round the room, then turned to Chin Chün and said: "You see the books and paintings here, the furniture and other things. They're very neatly arranged, not at all the way Yi-piao usually has them, all in sixes and sevens. This is the result of Hsia-fen's tidiness."

Chin Chün laughed and said: "Yi-piao must have many good lives behind him, if he has acquired the grace of such a very fine wife."

Chu Hsia-fen pretended not to hear them, but he didn't go in to call Ts'ao Yi-piao. Instead, he stayed there and shuffled some papers in a drawer.

"Why don't you go and fetch your master?" asked Chin Chün.

"I want to show you what Master Ts'ao did in the examination," answered Chu Hsia-fen.

"We don't have to see it," said Kuo Chao-t'ing. "We know it's good."

"Don't talk like that," exclaimed Chu. "Every time he writes something, he always says himself that it's good, and yet he's always failed the exams. When he's really pleased and excited about it, the whole thing is worse, and he doesn't even qualify for the first reading. But this time he's very upset. He says he's written absolute rubbish. What I think, though, is that when he considers the work is bad, it might be just what the examiners are looking for. I'm really very hopeful, and that's why I want you two gentlemen to have a look at it." And he handed Chin Chün a manuscript written on red-ruled paper.

At that moment, they heard a noise from the bathroom. Ts'ao Yi-piao coughed, and then called out: "Hsia-fen, I can hear you chattering out there. Who are you talking to?"

"Master Kuo and Master Chin have come to see you," answered Chu. "They came a little while ago. Will you get up and come?"

"Ask them to sit down for a moment," called Ts'ao in reply. "You come on in here. I have something to say to you."

Chu Hsia-fen smiled at Chin and Kuo, and turned away to the bedroom. They could hear only the rustling sounds of someone putting clothes on, and the low murmur of voices. Then Chu Hsia-fen came back, smiling. He called Cassia to follow him, and went straight out. At the same moment, Ts'ao Yi-piao himself appeared, already changed into a long gown of fine white cotton, brand-new, embroidered with a pattern of large peony flowers and sesame seeds. His hair was glossy, his face was shining, and he looked very foppish.

He bowed in greeting, with folded hands, to Chin and Kuo. "I apologise for making you wait so long."

"We have just been admiring your splendid piece of writing," replied Chin Chün. "Very strange. You have actually learnt to compete with those lousy essayists on their own ground at last."

Ts'ao Yi-piao thrust out his hand, and snatched the manuscript from Chin Chün's grasp. He threw it in the waste-paper basket and said: "Don't mention that revolting piece of work to me again! We've engaged to meet Ch'ien Tuan-min, Ho T'ai-chen and Lu Jen-hsiang at Hsia-fen's house. Let's go there right away."

"What are we doing there?" asked Kuo.

"Quite true," said Chin Chün. "It was arranged the day before yesterday. We shall be celebrating Chu Hsia-fen's wedding."

"Hsia-fen has obviously left his former master," said Kuo. "What's the name of his new company, since apparently he is organising one independently, and where are they lodging?"

"He still hasn't decided yet," replied Ts'ao. "For today, however, he has borrowed Mr. Mei's place, the Bright Harmony Hall."

As he said this, Ts'ao wrote out three short notes. Then he called the page-boy Pinetree, gave him the notes, and told him to send the porter to deliver them. He also told Pinetree to hire a good-looking carriage for them.

"No need for that," replied Pinetree. "Mr. Chu left his carriage and horse here for you in the stable-yard out the back. He's going ahead on foot."

Ts'ao Yi-piao nodded his head, then turned to his companions. "In that case, we can go on with our talk once we get there."

When they arrived at Bright Harmony Hall, the whole place was full of bustle and gay confusion, fragrant with cassia and orchids, and hung all around with bright silk lanterns in painted patterns of phoenixes. There was a carpet spread out, embroidered with a design of two dragons playing in water, and on the walls were hung paintings of the Northern Sung academy. There was a bronze censer of the Hsüan-te period of the Ming dynasty, set up on a shelf at the side, and every chair and table had been carved by some famous craftsman in deep, rich elmwood. In the middle of all this, there stood a table spread with every form of delicacy, presented on dishes of the finest K'ang-hsi and Ch'ien-lung porcelain. Chu Hsia-fen was hurrying to and fro, attending to his guests. Ch'ien Tuan-min and Ho T'ai-chen had already arrived. Only Lu Jen-hsiang was yet to come, and the others all agreed that they could sit down without waiting for him.

Chu Hsia-fen offered each of his guests a cup of wine, and he himself sat down beside Ts'ao Yi-piao. Kuo Chao-t'ing called for the list of table-companions, and Ch'ien Tuan-min and Ho T'ai-chen were forced to support him. Then Kuo asked for Fragrant Lute, Chin Chün summoned Autumn Chestnut, Ch'ien Tuan-min called Clouds of Harmony, and Ho T'ai-chen called White Cloud. It was a scene of colour and fragrance, of golden winecups and the sound of castanets. The flowers of pleasure swept away the spirits of men, and the wine put an end to all thoughts of grief. The time passed gay and splendid, in the best of the ancient traditions.

Quite soon, however, the actors and other companions took their leave. Chu Hsia-fen, too, had been called to another party. Ts'ao Yi-piao and the other guests stayed on, and the talk gradually turned to comment and criticism of the leading officials and scholars of the day.

It was Ch'ien Tuan-min who began it. "Men of the past," he observed, "have said that the capital is a vast sea of men; and that is not so very far wrong. If you are working in any field of scholarship, you can always find someone to discuss questions with."

"Very true," said Chin Chün. "We ourselves, in the time since we came to the capital, have met a great number of different people, distinguished officials and prominent figures, great scholars and talented gentlemen. Yet on the other hand, when you think of them all, who is there that is really first class? Since we have the leisure now, let us discuss and consider them."

"You can't lump them all together," pointed out Ts'ao Yi-piao. "To my mind, they must be classified by what they are trying to do. For calligraphy, one would naturally cede first place to Kung P'ing, while P'an Tsung-yin is the finest connoisseur of inscriptions on bronze or stone. For poetry and *tz'u*, and for classical essays, then Li Chih-min of K'uai-chi is the outstanding man of our time. For wide learning and a powerful memory, as a general all-round man, there is Chuang Chih-tung, the outstanding scholar from the north."

"Chuang Yu-p'ei of Fengjun and Ch'en Ch'en of Foochow, what about them?" added Kuo Chao-t'ing.

Ch'ien Tuan-min replied: "Those younger men have made quite a reputation for themselves



CH'ENG PO-YI (Sheng-yü), the bannerman scholar, examining a rare book with Kung P'ing (Weng T'ung-ho).

because of their effective arguments and analyses; but there are also Huang Li-fang of Jui-an and Wang Hsien-ch'i of Changsha, both gentlemen of very broad learning."

"Among the bannermen," remarked Ts'ao Yi-piao, "I would always recommend Chu-p'u as one of the outstanding figures."

"But there's always Ch'eng Po-yi," claimed Ch'ien Tuan-min.

"Li Shih-nung of Shunte has done fine work on the geography of Central Asia, and he is also a pillar of the literary scene," remarked Chin Chün.

"Of all these men," said Ho Tai-chen, summing up, "I can admire only the two Chuangs, as men of real value at this time. Chuang Chih-tung is a strong man, there's no limit to his abilities, and he certainly can be charged with great responsibilities and given command. But I am afraid that he is too fond of power and success. Chuang Yu-p'ei has great capacity and is very careful and thorough with things. He has courage, and he could manage great things, but it is a pity that he is rather too eager to seek positions."

The four men were enjoying their criticisms when outside they heard someone coming. It was Lu Jen-hsiang. They all welcomed him, and as he arrived, he said: "The court has ordered a Han-lin examination for the day after tomorrow. Had you heard?"

"No, is that true?" they exclaimed with surprise and pleasure.

Lu Jen-hsiang explained: "The man in charge of the Han-lin office told me about it today. The proclamation will be published tomorrow. Have pity on the poor old Han-lin scholars! Their hands will be trembling, and their eyes will be watering, and when this news is heard they'll piss themselves for panic! The price of ink in Liu-li Ch'ang will go up very quickly. It's just like the proverb: 'No-one ever pays attention to the Buddha until he has to, but when it does seem necessary they all rush to kiss his foot.'"

Everyone laughed, and started chatting again, but one or two of the company were a little anxious, and they soon made their farewells to Ts'ao Yi-piao and left.

The next day, just as Lu Jen-hsiang had predicted, there was indeed a proclamation announcing the examination. It involved all members of the Han-lin Academy, the Supervisors of Imperial Instruction, and the officials of Censorate and Scrutiny, and it was to take place in the Hall of Harmony Preserved.

Chin Chün did not fail to tell his wife, the Lady Chang, and together they prepared the things he would need. The Lady Chang was a most capable gentlewoman, and she gathered together everything that was necessary, replacing the items that were missing and mending those which needed repair. In a very short time, his equipment was packed and ready. Chin Chün himself retired to his library and studio, where he selected his favourite writing brushes, made from the finest rabbit-fur, and mixed a pot of the finest and smoothest ink.

The mixing of ink, in fact, was the making or unmaking of a Han-lin Academician of the great Ch'ing dynasty. When the ink was well mixed, the characters he wrote were rich and smooth, clear and black; and the first selection of appointees for Provincial Literary Chancellorship and other posts outside the capital was made on the basis of the calligraphy. If the ink had not been well prepared, then the characters appeared faint and irregular, and all that man's life he would never become anything more than a poor Han-lin scholar. It was a thing as important as the prime minister's blending flavours for a broth in ancient time.

After this brief digression, we may turn to the day of the great examination. Chin Chün drove into the city even before it was dawn. He alighted from his carriage by the Eastern Gate of Glory, slung his examination equipment on his back, and went straight to the Hall of Harmony Preserved. Great numbers of other examinees were already gathered there. He went inside and set up his small folding examination table in a corner on the eastern side of the hall, where he would gain the benefit of the morning sunlight, and then he gazed around to look for some acquaintance. Over on the left, he saw Ch'ien Tuan-min, Ho T'ai-chen and Kuo Chao-t'ing, and on his own side of the hall was Lu Jen-hsiang. On Lu's table was a folded sheet of white paper, which he kept covered up with his hands as if he was afraid that someone might see it. He had his head bowed down, and he was writing something.

Chin Chün called greetings to each of his friends. Then he heard, from the eastern side of the hall, someone saying: "Master Chuang Chih-tung! Please come in!" Chin Chün craned his neck, but all he saw was a little dwarf figure, with a face like a monkey's, a black greasy beard, and the whole top of his head covered in a mop of short-cropped hair. He was wearing a new gown and jacket of light-weight silk. He looked quite unusual, and who else could that be but Chuang Chih-tung? He too carried on his back a cane box of examination equipment.

He came to the eastern side of the hall, looked around, and made his way down the second aisle to a young man, sitting on the left hand side, who had a squarish face, big ears, and a very proud bearing. Putting down his box, Chuang Chih-tung said to him: "Yu-p'ei, I'll sit with you."

Chin Chün looked at them carefully. He recognised Chuang Yu-p'ei, and the man sitting on the other side of Chuang Yu-p'ei was Chu-p'u. He thought to himself how these three eccentric fellows had flocked together this morning.

Very soon, the papers were handed out, and everyone set to work. While murmuring their own compositions, some scratched their heads, some chewed their fingernails, some rocked on their heels, some walked around and around in circles. A considerable number gathered about Chuang Chih-tung. They would ask him one thing after another, and Chuang would answer them, waving his arms and stamping his feet. When it was already past noon, most people were halfway through their work, but Chuang Chih-tung had still not written a single word.

"Honourable Chuang," said Chu-p'u, "are you writing anything?"

"Inspiration is still lacking," answered Chuang Chih-tung.

Chu-p'u laughed. "At this rate, it will be dark before your inspiration has arrived. You'll be handing in blank paper again, just as you did last time."

Chin Chün heard this exchange and smiled to himself. A short time later, as he was com-

posing his final draft, writing directly onto the script paper, he heard someone hand in his manuscript. Looking around, he saw that Chuang Yu-p'ei was gathering his equipment together. He was obviously pleased with himself, and he left with a swagger.

Chin Chün too was practically finished, with only a formal piece of poetry to compose. He quickly made a fair copy of it, checked it over, realised that it was quite good, and made sure that there were no flaws in the final script. Then he saw that Ch'ien Tuan-min and Ho T'ai-chen were coming over to him, and Lu Jen-hsiang called across: "Wait for me a moment, I've just got to stick in a correction."

"Shall I do the pasting for you?" offered Ch'ien Tuan-min.

"Fine. Thank you," replied Lu.

As Ch'ien used the scissors and paste, Chin Chün looked at him and remarked: "You're a first-class craftsman, Tuan-min. There's not a mark to show. It's like a tunic of the gods, without a seam."

Then Kuo Chao-t'ing came over to join them, and the four men left the hall together. As they did so, they passed by Chuang Chih-tung, still strolling about on the steps to the eastern side of the building, talking to himself as he composed his piece. As he saw Chin Chün he turned to him, caught him by the sleeve, and said: "Chün, come and admire what I have composed."

At this moment, Chu-p'u, who had also handed in his paper, came walking past. He pointed back into the hall and said: "Chih-tung, do you realise the place is practically dark. Hadn't you better get something written down?"

Chuang Chih-tung heard what he said, and he suddenly realised that he really would have to hurry. Turning to Chin Chün and his companions, he asked: "Will you people be good enough to help me finish off my scribblings?"

They hurriedly handed in their finished work, and went back once more into the examination hall. One man prepared his paper by filling into the folios a padding sheet with lines on, while another mixed the ink. Ch'ien Tuan-min did the pasting for corrections, Lu Jen-hsiang held a candlestick. Chuang Chih-tung wrote half in formal script, and half in grass-style shorthand. But it was already lamp-lighting time when he had finished, and they came out of the Eastern Gate of Glory, and each went home to rest.

Some days later, when the results of the examination were published, Chuang Yu-p'ei was listed as first of the first class. Chin Chün and Ch'ien Tuan-min were also in the first class, and all their other friends were second class. So Chuang Yu-p'ei became Senior Expositor of the Han-lin Academy, Chin Chün was an Expositor, and Ch'ien Tuan-min a Reader. Chuang Chih-tung already held a post, and although on this occasion he had not done very well in the examination, he received neither promotion nor disgrace.

Since Chin Chün had gained such advancement, it was only natural that great numbers of his fellow-citizens from Soochow and his colleagues in the government now came to congratulate him. He was occupied with this bustle of activity for several days. A little while later, when it had died down again, he recollected that Chuang Yu-p'ei had been one of the people who called to congratulate him. He had not yet returned the visit. Ordering his carriage to be harnessed up, therefore, he went to pay his respects.

The two men had known one another for some time, so the porter took Chin Chün directly to the library. When he arrived, Chuang Yu-p'ei was writing on what looked like some official paper, but as soon as he saw his visitor he slipped it into a drawer and came to welcome Chin Chün with a smile. They sat down together, talked over the events of the last few days, and discussed the examination. They remarked upon Chuang Chih-tung's embarrassment, laughed at the recollection, and then realised that it was already time for lunch.

"Brother Chin, you must have something to eat with me here," said Chuang Yu-p'ei. Chin Chün accepted with every sign of pleasure, since they were having such an interesting conversation. Chuang Yu-p'ei, however, now looked a little taken aback. He paused for a moment, made some

excuse and went out. He called his servant, said a few words to him in a low voice, and came inside again. As he did so, the servant came from the main room carrying a parcel in both hands. Chin Chün thought nothing of all this; the only thing he was concerned about was his lunch, for he was already starting to feel quite hungry.

A long and uncomfortable period of waiting followed, however, and there was no sign of food. Chuang Yu-p'ei chatted about this and talked about that, cheerful and enthusiastic, while Chin Chün did his best to reply politely. It was just about three o'clock, and then at last the servant came in with chopsticks and bowls on a tray, four plates of food, and four dishes of appetisers. Chuang Yu-p'ei invited Chin Chün to sit down, and Chin Chün was already so hungry that he took no thought for the preliminary courtesies, but simply grabbed up a bowl of rice and ate it straight down. It was half cold, but he was just too hungry to notice, and at last he felt a little bit better.

As he was enjoying his food, however, there was suddenly a tremendous shouting outside the door, and Chuang Yu-p'ei's face began to change colour, alternating from red to white. Chin Chün asked what was going on, but before Chuang could reply, they heard someone shouting outside: "It's no use trying to pull rank on me. You're just a shabby Han-lin scholar. I don't care if it's the Grand Secretary himself, if he eats other people's nice food, then he's got to pay for it!"

You may well ask who this noisy fellow was. It was a rice-shop coolie, and Chuang Yu-p'ei had been owing him money for two months past, and hadn't paid him anything in all that time. The man had been coming to complain every day, and Chuang had always been fobbing him off. The rice-shop people had completely lost patience, and now the coolie was really making a fuss. As to the fact that Chuang Yu-p'ei held the highest rank in the Han-lin Academy but still couldn't pay for his food, that certainly seems pretty stupid, but there was nevertheless a reason for it.

Chuang Yu-p'ei had been orphaned very young, and his parents left him extremely poor. While he was still a child, he was brought up by a paternal cousin. Fortunately, since he was an intelligent student, he had no trouble with the examinations, and while he was still a young man he found himself a member of the Han-lin. And at this point he took a wife with a good dowry.

Chuang Yu-p'ei, however, was a proud man, and he did not like having to rely upon others. He felt that he had reached the stage when he could set up on his own, and he believed that his wife's fortune made him quite well-to-do. So he bravely said goodbye to his cousin, refused to accept any more help in the future, and went to set up his own establishment in the capital. How could he have guessed the blow that fate was to deal him? Before he had been in Peking for a single year, his wife was dead.

Chuang Yu-p'ei was a very bad manager. He earned very little money, he spent everything that he had, and after a time, he had pawned or sold all his property. Nevertheless, he refused to go home with his tail between his legs, and he was not prepared to ask help from his cousin. By this time, he was reduced to the stage that he never knew where his next meal would come from. When he came top in the examinations, he could not avoid the rounds of congratulations, and he had quite come to the end of his resources. It was really most pitiful: for the last three days he had been eating nothing but plain boiled rice gruel. Most of his servants had left him, there remained only one or two whom he had brought with him from his home district, and they were constantly complaining.

At this particular time, for breakfast he had half a bowl of gruel, and he hadn't eaten anything solid for days. He thought angrily to himself: "What's the use of this confounded promotion? Look at the ministers in the capital and the governors in the provinces. They're not as good as I am. A keen eye for the main chance, a quick hand for the bribe, and a complete lack of conscience—and then there they are with a splendid carriage and fine horses and lashings of excellent food. Why can't I be like that? Instead, I finish up in this sort of situation, with just enough food for half a meal every time. It's so unjust!"

The more he thought about it, the more annoyed he became. Then he recalled that a couple of days before someone had said that the Viceroy of Chekiang-Fukien had been taking bribes for appointment to some of his subordinate offices, and the Governor of Kweichow had been embezzling the official salaries. Worst of all was the famous Viceroy Li of Chihli, proud and extravagant, insubordinate and corrupt. He could impeach him for that! Spurred on by the empty feeling in his belly, and by a general sense of indignation, he felt quite choked with rage about the whole thing. His new promotion had qualified him to send in memorials, and he decided to use the opportunity to tell all about these misdeeds. The impeachment would be a satisfactory way to relieve his anger, and it would also show that he was himself a brave fellow, with no fear of enemies in high places. Even if he was dismissed, all the empire would be excited about it, and he could be quite certain that people would bring him presents of food. Otherwise, the way things were going, he could very easily die quietly of starvation.

Having decided on his plan, he carefully drafted his memorial. Then, of course, Chin Chün turned up, and when it came to time for lunch he made some polite noise about it. He never expected that Chin Chün would take him up on the invitation, and he had not the least idea what he could say. So he had taken one of his best cotton gowns, and told his servant to pawn it for a dozen strings of cash. Then the servant was to go to the eating house and buy some dishes, just to make things look respectable. He could hardly imagine that the shameless creditor would come and make a disturbance to his face.

Chuang Yu-p'ei blushed furiously and said: "That scoundrel! Just because I have been short of ready cash on one occasion, and I had to owe him a few copper pieces. I am usually quite polite to such people, but he is taking advantage of my good nature, coming up here like this. What's the use of being polite?"

He raised his voice and called out: "Come in. Come in." Only the servant who had been away pawning the gown made his appearance, and Chuang Yu-p'ei glared at him: "You get hold of that scoundrel of a debt-collector and tie him up for me. Take my card and go to the local guard, and get the officers there to give him a good beating. We'll see if he still wants to make a fuss then."

The servant, not very impressed, acknowledged the order only slowly, and he sneered as he turned away. Chin Chün could see that things were only going to get worse, so he spoke to Chuang: "Yu-p'ei, you mustn't get so angry. This fellow's behaviour is really quite revolting. Everyone goes through times when they have plenty of money, and other times when things are a bit tight. If you happen to be short of ready cash at the moment, he still knows that you will pay him eventually and will never deceive him, and he has no reason to hound you in this fashion. If people are allowed to do this sort of thing, we poor clerks at the capital will have no peace from one day to the next. Certainly the fellow should be punished. On the other hand, now that you have been promoted, you ought to be generous. After all, it's only a very small matter, and the man is such a petty fellow, people wouldn't think it right for you to argue with him."

Then he turned to the servant and said: "You go out and talk to that fellow. Tell him not to make a row, or the Honourable Chuang will be really angry at his discourtesy. Not only will he refuse to give him the money, but he will hand him over to the beadle to deal with him severely. Even now, I am barely successful in persuading the Honourable Chuang to be lenient. As for the debt, tell the fellow to come to my place to collect it, and for the time being I shall supply the money so that he can be paid straight away."

"Right, sir," said the servant, and went out to arrange things.

"That's really very generous of you, Brother Chin," said Chuang Yu-p'ei. "If I had my way, I'd give the fellow a good hiding, and even if I had the money I wouldn't pay him. But now that you have paid him off for me like that, I promise I shall return the money to you some day."

"You're joking," answered Chin Chün. "Good friends shouldn't even talk about things like that."

By this time, they had finished eating, and the rice shop coolie had left. Chin Chün made his farewells and returned to his lodgings without further incident.

Next morning, when he got up, one of his servants brought in the official *Peking Gazette*, and there was a reference to a memorial from the Senior Expositor of the Han-lin Academy, Chuang Yu-p'ei. Chin Chün didn't pay much attention to it. The day after that, however, the *Gazette* gave the text of an imperial edict, saying someone had reported in a memorial that the Viceroy of Chekiang-Fukien and the Governor of Kweichow were both corrupt and dishonest, and that Li Hung-chang of Hofei was also implicated. The imperial decree was strong and firm, and the Viceroy of Kiangsu-Anhwei-Kiangsi was ordered to make a full investigation. The next item in the *Gazette* noted that the Emperor was giving an audience to Chuang Yu-p'ei, newly appointed as Secretary to the Council of State.

Chin Chün suddenly realised that the impeachment was all the work of Chuang Yu-p'ei. So that was the piece of official-looking paper that he had seen on Chuang's desk two days ago. He tossed the *Gazette* aside and went out to see his friends.

No matter where he went that day, people were talking about Chuang Yu-p'ei. They were arguing everywhere, and he was the central topic of conversation for the whole capital. Chin Chün made his way to Ho T'ai-chen's lodgings, and Ho told him that when Chuang had sent in his memorial he was immediately summoned to an audience before the Emperor which lasted two hours. He had been received with several words of praise from the Son of Heaven himself. "Lucky for him," said Chin Chün.

It was no more than a joke to Chin Chün, but how could he tell what extraordinary good fortune had overtaken Chuang Yu-p'ei that day he put in his memorial? With some idle time on his hands, he had decided to impeach a viceroy and a governor. The next day he reported on a provincial administrator and a judge, and he then impeached in succession the six administrative boards and the nine ministers of state. His brush flowed over the paper, his words were sharp and his arguments convincing.

Close to the throne, Prince Ching, Kao Yang-tsao and Kung P'ing secretly supported him, and because of their influence the emperor read every word that he wrote. In the space of half a year there were countless high officials who were dismissed or disgraced by means of Chuang Yu-p'ei's reports. Everyone in the court eyed him askance, and everyone was afraid of him. No one dared to let a fart, in case Chuang Yu-p'ei should smell it and impeach him. Even when he wasn't there people dared to talk only in whispers, very much as if the walls had ears.

Chuang was truly frightening. Again and again, when someone did something, even in a lady's bedchamber, or when people were talking quietly in a secluded room, somehow or other he found it out, and he published everything. The people became still more afraid of him, and he was looked upon with awe, like a devil.

To cut a long story short, everyone became quite terrified, and Chuang Yu-p'ei had all he could wish for. He no longer had to worry where his next meal was coming from, or whether he had enough money. His carriages and horses, his clothing and raiment, everything was splendid and elegant. He moved house, to a larger, taller building, and within this mansion it was just as in the proverb: "One master giving orders in the hall, a hundred servants at his bidding down below." His reputation filled the world, the highest officials hastened to greet him, horses and carriages clogged the streets that led to his door from morning to night; and when Chin Chün tried to call on him, he only got to see Chuang Yu-p'ei once in ten times. It was all quite a change from the old days.

He still kept company with Chuang Chih-tung, Huang Li-fang, Chu-p'u, Ho T'ai-chen and Ch'en Ch'en, and they were known as the Six Gentlemen of the Pure Group. In the morning there would be a sealed memorial, in the evening there would be a secret message, and there was so much disturbance that in the ensuing clouds of confusion and doubt even the chickens and dogs were nervous. The general conclusion was that the road to justice had been opened, that officials

everywhere were honest and plain-speaking, and that the government was purified and wise. Let's leave it at that.

One day, Huang Li-fang's mother died, and he held a mourning service. Since Huang was a member of the Pure Group, all the officials came, from the Grand Secretary downward. How could anyone fail to attend? There was a grand display of ceremonial robes and carriages.

On this occasion, Chin Chün also arrived at crack of dawn, together with Ch'ien Tuan-min, Lu Jen-hsiang, Ts'ao Yi-piao and a number of other friends. They gathered together, talking of one thing and another, and after a short time Chuang Chih-tung and Chu-p'u both came over to join them. They looked at the funeral scrolls and the mourning couplets, and criticised their literary style. Then Chuang Chih-tung exclaimed: "Come and look at Yu-p'ei's piece, he generally writes something pompous."

Ch'ien Tuan-min was holding a snuff-box of white jade, and rubbed the powder into his nose as he strolled across the room. Hung in the middle of the door-screens was a pair of white silk mourning scrolls, eight feet long. Word by word, Ch'ien read it out:

*When I look at the fame of Fan Meng-po⁵ in the court;
If a mother can claim she taught her son like this,
Then indeed she can now depart in peace.*

*Chang Chü-cheng,⁶ despite his father's death, remained in office;
Unequal to such devoted loyalty, your son must retire,
For three years indeed the world will mourn your passing.*

He finished reading, shook his head and remarked: "The first part's good, but the second half is overdrawn. It's inappropriate and ostentatious."

Chu-p'u, looking over Ch'ien Tuan-min's shoulder, observed: "Yu-p'ei has caused a tremendous disturbance, but this sort of writing will make people look at him with some suspicion. I'm afraid he may cause trouble for our Pure Group very soon."

As they were talking, a murmur went through the crowd, calling for silence, and a moment later the whole room had grown still. Four ushers in bright ceremonial dress emerged from the gathering, and waited respectfully under the eaves at the entrance to the hall. Chin Chün and the others looked at the scene of welcome and thought that one of the grand secretaries must be coming. In mourning ceremonies at the capital there is a definite rule for choosing the number of ushers: when a prince or grand secretary comes, one should receive him with four ushers; when it is a minister or vice-minister, two ushers; for all other guests, only one. Now, as they saw these four men appear, they guessed that the visitor would be one of the grand secretaries.

To their great surprise, however, as they looked out into the distance, the person they saw arriving was the celebrated Chuang Yu-p'ei, with a bright blue button on his cap, and a plump, clean-shaven face. He came into the hall to the accompaniment of a respectful silence, while the four ushers trembled for awe as they greeted him. Chuang Yu-p'ei did no more than nod his head, and thereafter there was no sound but the three strokes of the wooden clapping-boards which announced his progress. He went straight to the funeral tablet, kowtowed and paid his respects, and when that ceremonial was over he left the hall.

A short time later he returned, having changed into more comfortable clothes, and looked around the room. Seeing Chin Chün and his companions standing together in a group he went

⁵When Fan P'ang 范滂 (137-169) of Later Han was imprisoned in 166 A.D. his mother was quite undisturbed, knowing that her son was following a righteous course.

⁶Chang Chü-cheng 張居正 (1525-1582) remained in office as Grand Secretary of State without asking leave when his father died in Hupei, as a gesture of undivided loyalty to the emperor.

across to them, gave a general salutation, and said: "Congratulations to all of you, gentlemen. I have just come from the palace, and I have learnt there several items of good news."

They were all taken aback, and no-one could think of anything to say. Then Chuang Yu-p'ei took out a small folder from the pocket of his silken boot. In the folder was a half-sheet of white paper for writing memorials, and he handed this to Chin Chün. The others crowded around to look.

The paper said: "Edict proclaimed on such-and-such a day: Chin Chün appointed Provincial Literary Chancellor of Kiangsi; Ch'ien Tuan-min appointed Provincial Literary Chancellor of Shensi-Kansu; Chu-p'u appointed Provincial Literary Chancellor of Chekiang." There were many others, but they did not concern Chin Chün and his friends.

Then Chuang Yu-p'ei turned to Chuang Chih-tung and added: "You have a special mention. You have been appointed Governor of Shansi."

"Don't talk nonsense," protested Chuang Chih-tung, somewhat taken aback. "That is impossible."

"This is the decision of our sage Emperor," answered Chuang Yu-p'ei, quite unmoved. "It's a once in a lifetime opportunity. I am sure that you can realise your own ambitions, and repay the grace and trust of our ruler. Not only do I offer you my personal congratulations, but I really feel that this is the best of good fortune for all the people of the empire."

Chuang Chih-tung shook his head in modest self-deprecation.

Chuang Yu-p'ei continued: "Here, today, we have yet another item of news. Vietnam has been viciously invaded by French troops, and the King of Vietnam has asked aid from our court. The Emperor is planning to send soldiers to their relief."

"The French have just been defeated in the war with the Prussians," noted Ch'ien Tuan-min, "and they are surely not so strong as they were. Why do they suddenly turn aggressive now against one of our tributaries? It's really wicked. If we can't show our power against them on this occasion, how shall we ever keep the barbarians under control?"

"No," replied Chin Chün. "France is much the same size as England, and the people are remarkably brave and fierce. Several score years ago they had a great king named Napoleon, and every country was afraid of him. They're really tough. Even if they have been defeated by Germany, if we once start shooting at them we had better be very careful. We don't want another shameful business like the last time."

"That mess-up last time," said Chuang Chih-tung, "was our own fault: if you invite a tiger inside your gates, you can't always get it out again. But in 1860 everything was done in a flurry, and we had the long-hair Taiping rebellion on our hands at the same time. We couldn't deal with both things at once. Certainly they beat us then, and they have become more and more impertinent ever since, and they are always blackmailing us now. But if we can catch them when they are over-confident, then we can bring them down. We would be showing the real power and prestige of our dynasty, and we could make them less eager for aggression next time."

Chuang Yu-p'ei clapped his hands. "Wonderful! Excellent!" he exclaimed. "Even if we aren't at full military strength, we still have some of our experienced generals from the time of the rebellions, men like Feng Tzu-ts'ai and Su Yüan-ch'un, who have each been through a hundred engagements. When you think of the French homeland, no more than two or three provinces of ours, there's obviously a limit to their strength. With some experienced men, and one big battle, we can give them a terrible shock to their pride. We shall be protecting our tributary, and we'll also be giving a warning to all the other countries, that they should be careful of us. What do you gentlemen think?"

Obviously, everyone said they agreed. And now that Chuang Yu-p'ei had finished his little speech, he explained that he had other business to attend to. He was one of the first to leave.

When Chin Chün and Chuang Chih-tung looked around, Lu Jen-hsiang and Ts'ao Yi-piao were no more to be seen. Ts'ao really didn't enjoy parties like that, and Lu Jen-hsiang, disappoint-

ed that no position was being awarded to him, had wandered off. The party broke up, and all the guests went home.

By the time Chin Chün returned to his lodgings, gangs of messengers were already clustered about his door, and there was a babble and chorus of "Well done, sir!" and "A fine promotion!" Having talked things over with his wife, Chin Chün gave out a series of tips.

He embarked then, on the routine business of audience with the Emperor and the receipt of his new commission, and he was engaged in a constant round of social activities until the day of his departure drew near.

Early one morning, on one of his last days in Peking, he left his home to pay farewell respects to the two grand secretaries, Kung P'ing and P'an Tsung-yin. When he had left P'an's house, he called in on Ts'ao Yi-piao, and found him very busy packing up to go home.

That year, the essay Ts'ao had been so disgusted with, and that Chu Hsia-fen had thought might win, had indeed passed the examinations. Now, however, after he had stumbled so many times in these exercises, the fruit of success seemed less desirable for him than it would have been. He realised that he was not the sort of man to enjoy the pleasure of official power; it was far better for him to indulge in scholarship and the pleasures of a leisurely life. Without hesitation, he decided that this was the time to go home to the south. In the past few days, he had seen all his friends off on their travels to posts outside the capital, and so he had easily resolved to take his leave, and he gave no further thought to his soft boy lover, Chu Hsia-fen.

When Chin Chün called in, Ts'ao Yi-piao told him all his feelings and what he intended to do. "We came here together and we leave here together," replied Chin Chün, "and that's fair enough. But how can you leave Chu Hsia-fen like that?"

"Every party must come to an end," remarked Ts'ao, "and we shall always have something to remember. Even if we stayed together as long as we both lived, and tried to keep company when we both had white hair, wouldn't that just be rather disgusting?"

He brought out a scroll painting entitled 'Portrait of Evening Clouds over Heaven', a memento he intended to keep to remind him of his relationship with Chu Hsia-fen, and he asked Chin Chün to write an inscription, explaining: "Everything falls to ashes in the end, but we leave some traces in a *kalpa* of countless millenniums."

Chin Chün composed a quatrain. They made their farewells to one another for the last time, and took their leave with great courtesy.

Then Chin Chün went to say goodbye to his friends Lu Jen-hsiang, Kuo Chao-t'ing and Ho T'ai-chen, and he continued down the road to the gateway of Chuang Chih-tung's lodging. He told his attendant to hand in his card, as he intended to say goodbye and also to congratulate Chuang on his appointment as a governor.

Soon afterwards, the chief servant of the house came out to him, half knelt in courteous greeting by the side of his carriage, and said: "Just at the moment, my master is having lunch in his private rooms. This morning he left orders, however, that if you were to come I should ask you to sit for a moment in the library. He has several things that he particularly wishes to discuss with you."

Chin Chün got down from his carriage, and the servant bore his card before him. They followed a winding path through the grounds, until Chin Chün had been brought to a garden studio, consisting of three rooms, two at the front and one hidden behind. The room that he entered was large and spacious, with glass and lattice-work all along the southern wall, a saddle-shaped desk of fragrant cedar set below these windows, together with a large armchair of rosewood. On the northern side of the room were six windows with gauze curtains, and below them a big divan of red sandalwood. Facing this was a set of comfortable chairs made from Amboyna wood, with patterned marble slabs set into the backrest. The eastern wall had four bookcases, and below them was a couch of elmwood, carved with the image of the famous concubine Yang Kuei-fei, drunk. On the western wall there were two large glass-fronted cupboards

of almondwood, with carved wooden batterns between each pane, and in the cupboards were valuable antiques. On the same western wall there was also a side-door, standing ajar. This was evidently the entrance to the inner room. On the floor was a magnificent carpet in a multitude of colours. The whole effect was both luxurious and charming.

As Chin Chün arrived, he paused to look around, and the servant said to him: "Please, sir, will you come in?" He lifted up the portière before the door of the adjacent room, and Chin Chün went to look further. Everything here was arranged even more elegantly than in the first chamber. Chin Chün sat down in front of a small mahogany writing desk by a window. The servant went away, and Chin Chün told his own man to go out and take some time off.

He waited quite a while, but there was no sign of Chuang Chih-tung. Anyone would have got bored, and it was only natural that Chin Chün should examine the books and papers on the desk in front of him. There he found a work on bibliography, which had been compiled long before, when Chuang Chih-tung was a literary chancellor. He was about to look through this to kill time, but then he caught sight of a piece of paper that had fallen to the floor. On it was an inscription saying: 'Proclamation of war, by Yüan Hsü against Ch'ien Leng-hsi.' He picked it up in amazement, and read the first lines:

Ch'ien, you are a dog. You listen to me respectfully, like the dog that you are! I am going to cut open your dog's belly, rip out your dog's guts, and kill the dog in the very centre of the doggish state. Dog that you are, take this as a warning to be careful!

Chin Chün almost burst out laughing, but managed to control himself. He realised that this must date from Chuang Chih-tung's early days in the examination circuit. Yüan Hsü had been one of Chuang's private secretaries and an eccentric literary figure of that region, and at that time had had a ludicrous feud with Ch'ien Leng-hsi, Chuang's other private secretary and a brother-in-law of Kung P'ing, out of jealousy for the favour the latter enjoyed from Chuang. He put the paper to one side.

He had been waiting so long, however, that he was now quite impatient. He thought seriously of leaving, but then he heard the side door leading to the inner room open, and the sound of laughter from the first room; a man and a woman were there. Footsteps moved across the room to the southern side, by the windows and the cedar desk. Again there was the sound of footsteps: one person turned back to the door; but the other sat down in the armchair by the desk and whispered: "Don't go away. Come here, quickly."

The other still stood beside the side doorway, then stamped her foot and whispered in reply: "Death to us! There's someone coming."

Her companion shouted out: "Damn your eyes, you bastard! Who asked you to come? Clear out!"

When Chin Chün heard this, his heart gave a jump. He peered through the bamboo screen across the connecting door, and saw the servant who had brought him scurrying away down the path, still with the visiting card in his hands. Turning back from the side door was a bewitching, graceful woman, thirty years old, with heavily made up face, and unbound feet. The man in the room, his mouth open with desire, gazed at her and called her to him. The woman said: "In broad daylight, how can we do it now?"

"Broad daylight is just what I want," he replied.

The woman looked at him and said: "You really mean that. I know about you! You have a cruel heart. Long ago you kicked your wife to death, and when she was about to die she told you that you would escape her only if you never went to bed again. Whenever you lie on a bed, her ghost will come to haunt you. Isn't it true that when night comes you are frightened of your wife's ghost, and you are afraid to go to bed?"

The man caressed her with his hand, and he gradually pushed her down onto the couch among the bookshelves on the eastern side of the room, the couch carved with the image of the

He peered through the bamboo screen



drunken imperial concubine. As he did so, he replied to her: "I would never kick you to death, but I shall certainly not let you off easily."

To these words, his companion made no further reply.

Because of the bookcases standing out from the wall, Chin Chün could not see at all clearly, but he had listened until he was quite out of patience. Partly annoyed, partly amused, he now began to feel remarkably hungry. He was even thinking of coming out of hiding, but he felt that would hardly be a good idea: he did not want to seem like someone who enjoyed being a Peeping Tom. His heart was beating hard for nervousness, and he scarcely dared to breathe. Then he heard the sound of giggling, though he still could not determine who it was. A moment later, the woman spoke: "Lover, these books of yours, they're going to fall down."

Before she had finished the warning, there came the sound of a crash, and a whole pile of books fell from the shelves onto the couch. It was really a situation where:

Why shouldn't the censor of morals demand his debt from the lady?

Since ancient times the world of books has been close to the place of secret love.

But if you want to know whom the books landed on, let me take my breath and I shall reveal all this to you in the next chapter.

Chapter VI⁷

WE HAVE TOLD how Chin Chün was in Chuang Chih-tung's study and he heard a woman panting and murmuring, and then he heard the sound of a crash as a whole pile of books fell off the bookcase onto the couch.

At that, when Chuang's companion had managed to extricate herself, she jumped up and said in a fury: "You never think of anything but your own pleasure. You wouldn't pay the slightest attention, even if someone was dying. It's useless to say that you're a scholar and a gentleman. You're so unfeeling, you let me come in danger of my life!"

As she reached this point in her tirade, she suddenly stopped what she was saying, burst out laughing, and rushed away with flying feet through the side door of the neighbouring chamber. Her companion, who had been attempting to put the books back into place again, laughed in his turn and ran to follow her. The room was quiet again.

Chin Chün seized his opportunity. Still frightened that Chuang might come back, which would be most embarrassing, he tiptoed his way out of the study, and immediately ran straight into the servant who had brought him there in the first place. The man was extremely worried, and full of the most profuse apologies. With a very red face, he explained that his master Mr. Chuang was taking his mid-day nap and had still not woken up. He would come himself, the very next day, to call on Mr. Chin. Chin-Chün laughed, and climbed into his carriage.

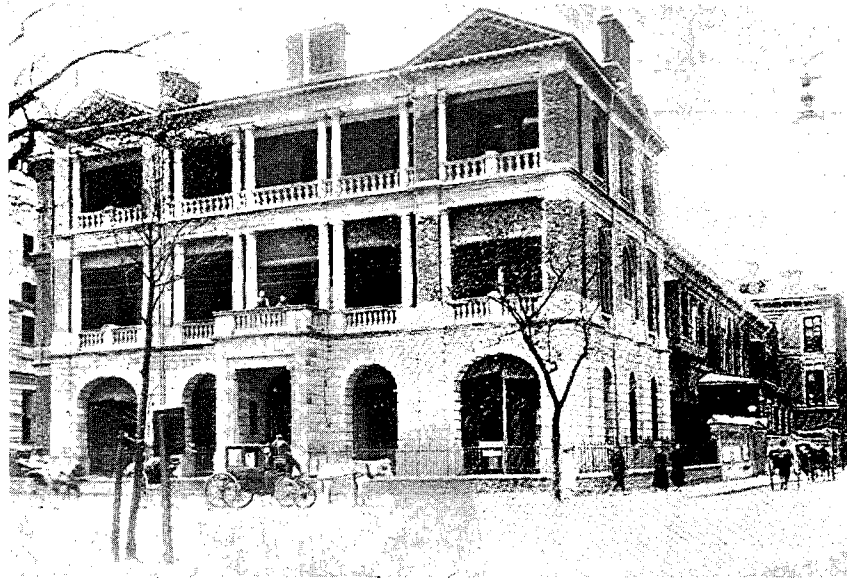
With outriders and footmen, tall horse and splendid equipage, he returned to his house as if borne upon the wind. When he arrived, he found the story too good to keep to himself; and so he told his wife and they both laughed until they could hardly stand up. Chin Chün thought later that he really ought to put some leading questions to Chuang Chih-tung, with implications about the incident he had been witness to. As it turned out, however, he was so busy with his preparations to leave the capital that the opportunity never presented itself.

A few days later, the Literary Chancellors departed for their posts in the provinces. Ch'ien Tuan-min went to Shensi and Kansu, and Chu-p'u to Chekiang. Ts'ao Yi-piao returned home to Ch'ang-chou, to pass his life there as a recluse. Chin Chün, accompanied by his family, consulted the almanac for a fortunate day on which to begin such a long journey to Kiangsi province, and set out on the first stage of the trip as far as Tientsin.



SHENG HSÜAN-HUAI,
the original of Ch'eng Mu-sheng.

⁷This chapter is only partly translated here, hence the opening couplets are not included.



HEAD OFFICE of the China Merchants' Steamship Company in Shanghai.

Just at this time, a number of ships from the American-owned Russell & Company had been bought by the Chinese for three million taels, forming the principal assets of the China Merchants' Steamship Company. This was a landmark in China's commercial development, and the newly-appointed commissioner to the company was Ch'eng Mu-sheng, the same man that Lu Jen-hsiang had met years before at the party with Pearl Liang. Ch'eng Mu-sheng was also Intendant of Customs at Tientsin, and an old acquaintance of Chin Chün. When he heard that Chin Chün had arrived from the capital he reserved for him a large stateroom on the next ship.

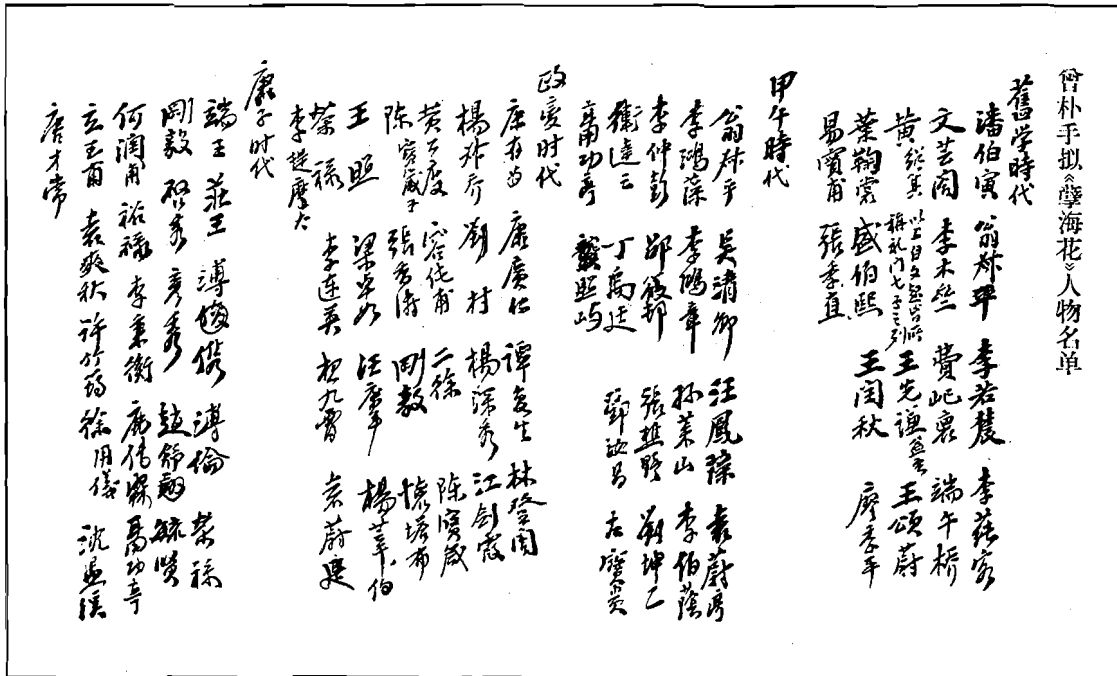
Chin Chün was particularly recommended to the care of the chief purser, and he was naturally treated extremely well. In a very short time they arrived at Shanghai. His official duties, however, prevented him from spending any time there, and he was soon travelling up the Yangtse in a river-steamer. The party disembarked at Kiukiang, and Chin Chün went straight to the provincial capital, Nanchang. He took over the seals and went directly to his office, and there he quietly began to make the arrangements for the commencement of the examinations.

This was the first time Chin Chün had acted as an examiner, and at the time Kiangsi was a remarkably good region of scholarly achievement. There had been many celebrated eight-legged essayists in that province in the past, and the tradition had not entirely died away. Chin Chün, therefore, was particularly careful in his marking and assessment, and did not dare to take it too hastily. In this way, without any particular events to record, the seasons followed one another on, and two years passed by.



KEY TO MAIN CHARACTERS

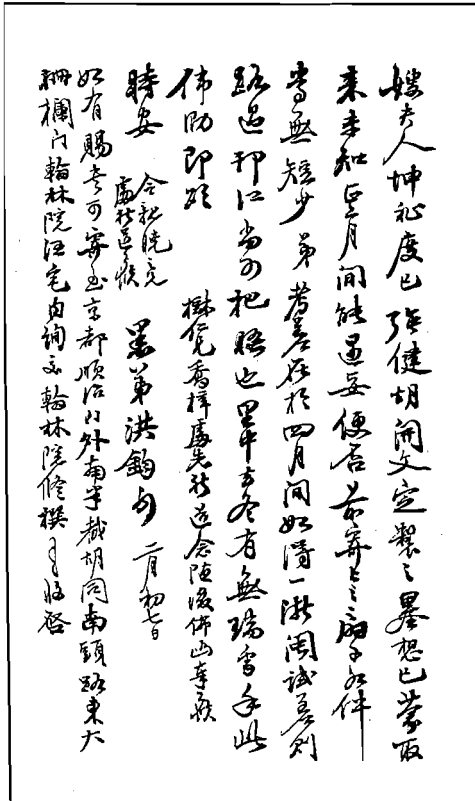
in the first five chapters of *A Flower in a Sinful Sea*, and their historical counterparts.



THE FIRST PART of Tseng P'u's handwritten list of major historical personalities to be included in *A Flower in a Sinful Sea*.

- Ch'en Ch'en 陳琛
Ch'en Pao-ch'en 陳寶琛 (Han-lin 1868; 1848-1935)
- Ch'eng Mu-sheng 成木生
Sheng Hsüan-huai 盛宣懷 (1849-1916)
- Ch'eng Po-yi 成伯怡
Sheng-yü 盛昱 (1850-1900)
- Ch'ien Leng-hsi 錢冷西
Ch'ien Chen-lun 錢振倫 (1816-1879)
- Ch'ien Tuan-min 錢端敏
Wang Ming-luan 汪鳴鑾 (1839-1907, the author's father-in-law)
- Chih-kang 志剛
Real name; author of 初使泰西紀要, publ. 1890
- Chin Chün 金鈞
Hung Chün 洪鈞 (Chuang-yüan 1868; 1840-1893)
- Chu-p'u 祝溥
Pao-t'ing 寶廷 (1840-1890)
- Chuang Chih-tung 莊芝棟
Chang Chih-tung 張之洞 (1837-1909)

- Chuang Yu-p'ei** 莊佑培
Chang P'ei-lun 張佩綸 (1848-1903)
- Ch'ung-a** 崇阿
Real name (*Han-lin* 1856)
- Feng Kuei-fen** 馮桂芬
Real name (1809-1874)
- Feng Tzu-ts'ai** 馮子材
Real name (1818-1903)
- Fu-lan-ya** 傅蘭雅
Chinese name of John Fryer (1839-1928)
- Ho T'ai-chen** 何太真
Wu Ta-ch'eng 吳大澂 (1835-1902)
- Hsieh Chieh-fu** 謝介福
Hsieh Chia-fu 謝家福 (1847-1896)
- Hsü Hsüeh-ts'en** 徐雪岑
Hsü Shou 徐壽 (1818-1884)
- Hsü Ying** 徐英
Hsü Chien-yin 徐建寅 (1845-1901)
- Hsüeh Fu-chen** 薛輔仁
Hsüeh Fu-ch'eng 薛福成 (1838-1894)
- Hu Hsing-yen** 胡星岩
Hu Kuang-yung 胡光墉 (1823-1885)
- Huang Li-fang** 黃禮方
Huang T'i-fang 黃體芳 (1832-1899)
- Huang Wen-tsai** 黃文載
Wang Wen-tsai 王文在 (*T'an-hua* of 1868)
- Jen Fu-ch'ang** 任阜長
Hao of Jen Hsün 任薰 (1835-1893)
- Kao Yang-tsao** 高揚藻
Li Hung-tsao 李鴻藻 (1820-1897)
- Kung Hsiao-ch'i** 龔孝琪
Kung Ch'eng 龔橙 (b. 1817)
- Kung P'ing** 龔平
Weng T'ung-ho 翁同龢 (1830-1904)
- Kung Ting-an** 龔定庵
Hao of Kung Tzu-chen 龔自珍 (1792-1841)
- Kuo Chao-t'ing** 過肇廷
Ku Chao-hsi 顧肇熙 (*Chü-jen* of 1864)
- Li Chih-min** 李治民
Li Tz'u-ming 李慈銘 (1830-1894)
- Li Hung-chang** 李鴻章
Real name (1823-1901)



The following four letters courtesy of Professor Huang Yin-p'u 黃蔭普, Hong Kong.

A LETTER WRITTEN by Hung Chün (the original of Chin Chün).

Li Jen-shu 李任叔

Hao of Li Shan-lan 李善蘭 (1810-1882)

Li Pao-feng 李寶豐

Li Feng-pao 李鳳苞 (1834-1887)

Li Shih-nung 黎石農

Li Wen-t'ien 李文田 (1834-1895)

Lu Jen-hsiang 陸仁祥

Lu Jun-hsiang 陸潤庠 (1841-1915)

Lü Ts'ang-shu 呂蒼舒

Li Shu-ch'ang 黎庶昌 (1837-1897)

Ma Chung-chien 馬中堅

Ma Chien-chung 馬建忠 (1844-1899)

Ming-shan 明善

I-hui 奕繪 (1799-1838)

Mo Yu-chih 莫友芝

Real name (1811-1871)

P'an Chih-shao 潘止韶

P'an Yü-jen 潘欲仁 (Tribute Student of 2nd grade 副貢, teacher of the author's father)

P'an Tseng-ch'i 潘曾奇

P'an Tsun-ch'i 潘遵祁 (Han-lin 1845; 1808-1892)

昨日曉晴日
 手教
 穠既難以名花
 清情之稠疊
 已好飲無任
 謝
 聊效小詩
 高誼明日倘
 能再具
 疏青伏候
 候衣賜琴
 清
 雅
 奇
 此
 申
 謝
 敬
 頌
 達
 夫
 兄
 大
 人
 年
 禧
 弟
 志
 遠
 敬
 頌
 三
 六
 日

A LETTER WRITTEN by Li Tz'u-ming, the original of Li Chih-min.

P'an Tsung-yin 潘宗蔭

P'an Tsu-yin 潘祖蔭 (1830-1890)

Pei Yu-ts'eng 貝佑曾

Fei Hsüeh-ts'eng 費學會 (University Student 監生; supervisor of river conservancy)

Prince Ching 敬王

Prince Kung 恭親王 (1833-1898)

Purity (Spring of the Western Forest) 太清西林春

Ku-t'ai-ch'ing 顧太清 (1799-?)

Seng-ko-lin-ch'in 僧格林沁

Real name (d. 1865)

Su Yüan-ch'un 蘇元春

Real name (d. 1908)

Sun Chia-ku 孫家穀

Real name (Chin-shih of 1856)

T'ang Hsün-po 湯燠伯

T'ang Ching-ch'ang 湯經常 (painter from Wuchin)

Ts'ao Yi-piao 曹以表

Tseng Chih-chuan 曾之撰 (Chü-chen of 1875, the author's father; 1843-1897)

Wang Hsien-ch'i 王仙杞

Wang Hsien-ch'ien 王先謙 (1842-1917)

凡處頃因行李戒涂深虞旅費不敷俟
 津派處匯項來方始行也着為教有餘
 否然即有餘後望先復印氣
 統家老弟同年著安 先父回板之
 家慈節略一半日開出奉
 呈也日再抄

A LETTER WRITTEN by Li Wen-t'ien, the original of Li Shih-nung.

寓目在昨晚南一席願望
 賢者得之不意竟是外調洋海膏腴不知何人擬
 補合肥既未談及弟自不便相詢要肅一挽外開除
 修並司集司見之姻親聲敘中不令例恐未審的
 也子首微雪何是冬不潛藏止酒屏鑑縮全而已
 復頌
 籌安不宣 佩倫頓首 十二月十日

A LETTER WRITTEN by Chang P'ei-lun, the original of Chuang Yu-p'ei.

Wang Kung-hsien 王恭憲

Huang Tsun-hsien 黃遵憲 (1848-1905)

Wang Tz'u-yüan 王慈源

Huang Tzu-yüan 黃自元 (Pang-yen of 1868)

Wo Liang-feng 倭良峯

Wo-jeu 倭仁 (d. 1871)

Yang Mo-lin 楊墨林

Yang Fang 楊坊 (Shanghai entrepreneur)

Yang Yung-ch'un 楊詠春

Hao of Yang I-sun 楊沂孫 (1812-1881)

Yao Feng-sheng 姚鳳生

Yao Meng-ch'i 姚孟起 (calligrapher from Soochow)

Yüan Hsü 袁旭

Yüan Ch'ang 袁昶 (1846-1900)

Yün Hung 雲宏

Jung Hung (Yung Wing) 容闕 (1828-1912)